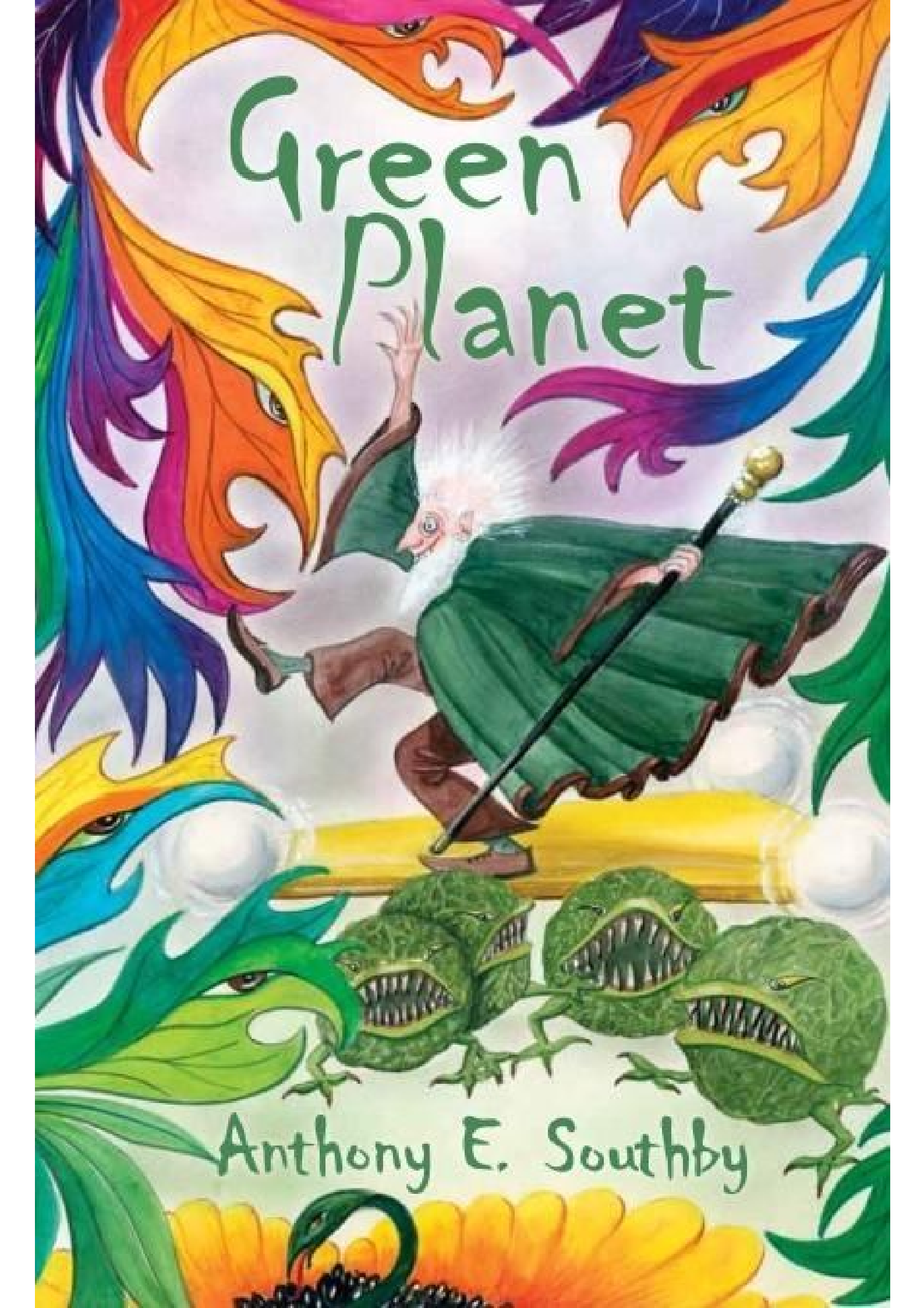




Green Planet

Anthony E. Southby

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Chapter 1

Philip Birch sat unconcernedly staring across the classroom while Mr Whittle, his 8th Grade maths teacher, droned on about the basic principles of geometry. He was a wiry looking man with a very high receding hairline and he wore a pair of small spectacles perched on the end of his unusually large nose. He wore old shirts with long sleeves and frayed edges. He wasn't exactly the sharpest maths teacher either, so quite a lot of typical classroom fooling around went unnoticed.

Philip eyed his best friend Robert who sat three rows in front of him, and noticed his head bob up and down slowly. A clear indication that Mr Whittle's droning magic was working; Robert would soon be fast asleep. He was a fairly overweight pupil who hated to overexert himself. He wasn't all that bright either; a round of maths was a guaranteed way of putting him to sleep.

Philip on the other hand was tall and lanky with a fair complexion. He had a freckled face with a pointed nose and a scruffy thatch of red hair. Not only was his hair scruffy, but so was his appearance in general. His shirts were usually stained with some unrecognisable substance, and his trousers always had a hole in them somewhere. Philip was always in the wars, usually covered in cuts and bruises, and wherever he went trouble seemed to follow.

A round of maths only spurred Philip on to get up to some kind of trouble, and getting into trouble was something he managed quite well.

Wham! 'Oh shucks, I missed,' he gasped. The eraser he had thrown had been intended for his friend Robert and not for Frank Featherstone. In fact, hitting Frank was a mistake that would be paid for dearly. Frank had dark brown hair, shaved into a neat brush cut. He had an olive skinned complexion and was always neatly dressed for the sake of his image. He had a hardened face with a flat nose and a large mole on his left cheek. Frank was not only six feet tall as well as wide, but he had been kept back a couple of years due to lack of observation, and was quite a lot older than Philip, not to mention the fact that he was Senton High's lightweight

boxing champion.

Frank stood up in disgust. 'Who hit me?' he shouted. 'Whoever did this is going to pay!'

Philip sank back into his chair, his face bright beetroot red. If there had been a big black hole next to him, he would have gladly crawled into it and dissolved.

'It was you, wasn't it Birch?' Frank roared, pointing his finger accusingly. 'I'm going to kill you, you rotten turd!'

Frank motioned forward then suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. Mr Whittle was tapping his shoulder with his pointer stick, and he looked anything but pleased.

'Listen here, Mr Featherstone, I will not tolerate this aggressive behaviour in my classroom!' he demanded, prodding him behind his ear like a farmer with his sheep. 'This is not an arena. Detention for Frank Featherstone on Friday afternoon!'

'But it wasn't me!' he cried in disgust. 'Philip hit my head with an eraser; he's the culprit here!'

'Listen here young man; you are nothing but a bully, always picking on others weaker than yourself. I think that it's about time that you were punished for your bursts of uncontrolled rage!'

So detention it was. The one thing about Mr Whittle was that he was very stubborn in his ways, and once his mind was made up, things were final.

Philip shrank back in his chair, and a cold fear crept up his spine. How was he supposed to escape the vicious clutches of Frank Featherstone? Mr Whittle could have put him in detention as well, then at least things wouldn't have looked so bad. Philip was beginning to feel desperate, what on earth was he going to do?

Robert glanced back, realizing who the eraser had been intended for. Beads of perspiration welled up on his fat forehead as he empathized with his friend who now sat in awkward silent anguish. White-faced, Philip stared back at Rob.

As the minutes ticked by, Philip's heart rate quickened. He had to come up with some kind of a game plan to escape Frank's evil grasp, knowing very well that sooner or later he would be punished for his terrible mistake. To endure a beating from Frank Featherstone would be like getting run over by an entire rugby team.

Frank turned his head slowly, his eyes pointing forward like the barrel of a loaded shotgun, with the veins on his head standing out like cords. He frowned at Philip. 'I'm going to get you, Birch!' he quietly mouthed in rage.

Philip was a ball of nervous jelly by then, and any ideas of escape were few and far between. He glanced forward at the clock on the wall – quarter to two, fifteen minutes to home time. The question was: how on earth was he supposed to get from the classroom into the sweet smelling safety of his bedroom without being caught?

Five minutes to two. Time was definitely ticking. Philip squirmed at his desk, wishing for some kind of magic disappearing ointment, so he could smear himself into thin air.

He gazed across at the classroom window. Fortunately they were on the ground floor, and because of his tall lanky structure there was a good chance he could squeeze out through the narrow bars to the back of the school.

Robert looked back at Philip. He suddenly realized his friend's exact intentions, and shook his head in horror. 'No, don't do that, you'll get into trouble,' he mouthed cautiously.

The way Philip figured, he was in so much trouble already, what difference would a little more make? As he very well knew, climbing through a window at Senton High was a very serious offence.

Finally the time had come – RRRRiiing! The school bell sounded. Philip's heart felt as if it was stopping. If only he could travel back in time and undo the mistake he had made.

Frank stood up and edged slowly towards the door, constantly looking back to check Philip's exact position, thrusting his fists viciously through the air as he walked. He swung his right arm forward and his left arm into an undercut.

'You are a dead man Birch,' he mouthed, rolling back his shoulders and smirking.

As Frank passed through the door, Philip checked to see if Mr Whittle was looking in his direction. No problem – his nose was pasted to the blackboard. Philip darted forward to an open window, squeezing his legs through the open bars, and forcing his lanky body through the narrow gap. 'Ouch!' he squeaked, finally forcing his chest through the narrow space between the bars. His head was nearly through, although not quite; his ears were still jammed in between the bars. Fortunately for Philip the outside turf wasn't very low down and he managed to get a good foothold to help pry himself free. His ears throbbed as he tugged at the bars in frustration, yelping like a starved puppy.

Robert was standing by the window, and whispered loudly to him, 'You've got to get out right now or Mr Whittle will see you!'

'I know that Robert but I'm stuck!' Philip bleated.

'Robert, what are you doing by the window?' A voice suddenly boomed across the classroom.

'Nothing,' Robert answered sheepishly, using the more popular schoolboy reply, which always raised the most suspicion.

In Robert's distress, he sent Philip flying through the bars with a quick frantic

shove, forcing him out onto the grass below. The poor boy's ears throbbed as though he had already received a good wallop from Frank. He groped at his head, fondling his throbbing ears gingerly. He tried his best to ignore the intense pain because it would end up making short work of his secret escape plan.

* * * * *

Meanwhile Frank had been waiting outside by the water fountain, kicking up stones in frustration, and wondering why the wretched Birch brat was taking so long to show his face.

He marched back to the classroom in rage, the hairs on his neck standing up like a wild dog in attack mode.

He stormed in, gazing left and right in fury.

'Damn, there are only two people here!' Frank muttered to himself in disgust. 'Mr Whittle the bumbling maths teacher and Fatso himself. Where did Birch get to now? Where on earth did that red-headed clown go?'

'Robert, why are you making funny noises by the window?' Mr Whittle demanded.

Robert stood there looking confused, trying his best to cover for his friend who had thankfully run away before Mr Whittle could approach the scene.

'Er – the birds, Sir.'

'What about the birds, Robert?'

'Well I was kind of standing at your window making bird noises, Sir.'

'That's very nice young man, now would you kindly step outside, where you can complete your biology lesson,' he rapped, pointing the nervous schoolboy towards the door.

Robert's face was soaked with perspiration, yet he was very relieved that the interrogation had come to an end. Now he only had Frank 'The Great' to deal with.

'Oh no, it looks like I'm going to have to die for my friend,' Robert squirmed, walking fearfully towards the boxing champion fiend. Frank waited outside the classroom, and glared at him as he passed through the door.

'Not to worry, Fatso, I know very well where your friend is, considering he hasn't come through this door. He went through the window, didn't he?'

Robert stared at Frank in fear; his face turned from bright red to pale. Frank clutched him by the shirt, and shoved him roughly against the classroom wall, causing him to wet his trousers in fright.

'Yes, he went through the window,' Robert muttered, feeling a warm unpleasant

sensation trickle down his leg as he betrayed his friend. Luckily for Robert, Frank hadn't noticed his little accident, so he snuck off home clutching his schoolbag carefully at his front, and hoped that no one would notice his soaked trousers.

Frank disappeared around the side of the classroom like lightning, knowing that Philip would have a good head start on him by then. Frank knew very well that there was a big field behind the school, cordoned off all the way around by a high fence, which allowed very few options for places to run to or places to hide away. Another thing Frank knew was that his fitness far outshone Philip's, and catching him wouldn't pose too much of a problem.

Chapter 2

Startled, Philip stood up from the grass, and dashed to the side of the classroom to avoid being seen by Mr Whittle. His head throbbed and his ears rang with pain. In the background he could hear his poor friend Robert stuttering and squirming under pressure. Philip braced himself against the wall, his heart beating furiously. At any minute he expected Frank to appear from behind the classroom. He didn't even dare to go back toward the school; his only option now was to run to the end of the field in the hope that there would be a small hole at the end of the fence through which he could worm himself.

Philip waited for the voices to die down so that he could attempt to make a run for it.

Finally the classroom grew quiet. Philip took a peak behind the classroom wall corridor. 'Now or never,' he whispered.

He dashed across the sports field, wishing he had taken part in some sort of school sport activity before, instead of just sitting in the stadium, eating chocolates and drinking cool drink. As he ran he could almost hear his heart beat, his head still throbbed, and he was dripping with perspiration. He constantly looked around to see whether Frank was anywhere to be seen.

Thank goodness the coast was clear! He panted towards the fence at the far end of the field, and finally reached the end drooling like a bulldog lost in the Sahara desert. He slipped and slid down the embankment, hoping and praying that the fence had been vandalised in some way so he could force a way through.

'Oh shucks!' he exclaimed in utter dismay. The fence was completely intact. It seemed as though it was going to be very difficult for him to make his escape. As he crept up the embankment to check if the coast was clear, who should he see dashing towards him?

Frank was in close range, sprinting after him like a raging bull.

'Now I'm really in serious trouble,' Philip muttered in desperation. 'If Frank catches me I'm dead.' He began shaking at the knees as he fumbled back down

the embankment. He had to keep telling himself to keep calm and stay focused. Landing back at the bottom by the fence, he got up and ran further along. 'Let me check along the fence; maybe I'll get lucky and find a hole somewhere.'

Frank shouted from the top of the embankment, 'Birch, you stupid twit, I'm going to tear you into little pieces when I catch you!'

Philip increased his pace, pushing his system into overdrive, not daring to look back for a single moment. He raced forward, expecting Frank's large boxing fists to grab him at any minute. Still there was no sign of any opening, just an endless stretch of perfect fence. Even the top had been laced with barbed wire, so what other option was there now?

Philip continued forward, close to the point of surrendering himself to his fate. The stretch of embankment fencing was speedily coming to its end, and Philip knew very well that if he had to run back up the hill again that would most surely be his end.

Something gleamed in the distance, close to the opposite corner of the sports field. Was that a break in the fencing?

Philip leapt forward with Frank trailing very close behind; in fact Frank was virtually breathing down his neck.

'Got you, Birch, where are you going to run to now?' Philip rushed towards where the fence seemed broken, walking a bit unsteadily on his tired jelly like legs.

'Yes!' Philip grunted with relief, noticing a large hole in the fence up ahead, big enough for one lanky boy to fit through with a bit of a push.

Philip popped through in seconds, leaving Frank behind to force his way through to the other side in painful frustration. 'Birch, I'm going to crush your puny head in when I get through this fence!'

Frank squirmed and struggled, scratching himself viciously with the jagged mesh. He was determined to get through to the other side; he would even die doing it if he had to.

After a few minutes of bending jagged wires and twisting his body into knots like Houdini the Great, he finally managed to force his way through.

Philip rushed across the road, hastily checking to see whether there was any oncoming traffic or not.

Fortunately for Philip there weren't any speeding vehicles coming along the road, as he would most surely have been knocked over in his eagerness to get to the other side.

On the other side of the road, Philip could see workers in the process of digging a very large trench running along the roadside. Monotonous droning of earth-

moving equipment could be heard – large graders digging the soil over, shovels steadily spading turf into the air.

Philip remembered his mother mentioning the roadworks' project.

These people were in the process of erecting a high thick wall, running around the perimeter of the woods which were situated behind the school. Apparently, many of the animals living in the woods were running out across the road and causing nasty road accidents, pasted over the tar like strawberry jam. What made things rather creepy about the woods was: many people had ventured there, either on a picnic, or maybe just for a walk, and had vanished. Even search party members had gone missing in an effort to find them.

For this reason it was seen necessary to erect an 8 foot double wall, which was really serving a double purpose.

Frank glanced ahead, and spotted Philip on the other side of the road, heading towards a large clump of trees.

'Now I've got you Birch, now you're really trapped!' Frank bellowed, not even bothering to check for cars.

Philip looked around quickly to see where his enemy was, and noticed him jogging towards him not very far behind.

He stared down at the trench in front. Fortunately for him, there weren't any workers around to tell him to get lost, so he plunged forward, and fell hands first into the slippery mud. With Frank close behind he struggled frantically to his feet and pulled himself up over to the other side, then headed straight for the woods. After all, what other choice did he have right then?

'In a matter of seconds I'll have you by your scruffy neck, Birch!' Frank croaked, slipping and sliding in the muddy trench.

Philip was feeling very tired and he expected to be stopped in mid stride at any moment. Up ahead he saw a vast clump of dense trees. If he could only get there before Frank caught him, he would dash in between the trees and hopefully Frank would lose track of him, then he could find a place to catch a breather.

'Ouch!' Frank yelled; a sharp surging pain stabbed into his belly. 'Blast it, how am I supposed to run now with this horrible cramp in my stomach?'

He slowed down to a walk, clutching at his stomach in pain. Philip pushed on; his heart burned in his chest and his legs complained from the effects of the punishing jog. Completely unaware of Frank's little setback, he made his way through a clump of dense trees, zigzagging all the way. The pine needles and leaves crackled beneath his feet as he raced forward, and he hoped and prayed that he was finally free of the enemy.

He peeked back over his shoulder, but could see no trace of Frank. He decided to stop for a breather and listen for crushing leaves and pine needles.

The place was dead quiet, except for a gentle breeze blowing through the trees.

‘And I thought Frank was supposed to be a big deal boxing champion,’ Philip sniggered, standing quietly under an old oak tree, ‘now he’s nothing but a rotten loser.’

The anxious schoolboy listened carefully for the crackling of pine needles being crushed under Frank’s feet, but not a sound was heard.

‘I wonder how long I should wait before he decides to go home?’ Philip asked himself, peering at his watch every few seconds. He gazed up into the trees and jumped with fright at the slightest sound of a breaking twig. He thought of all the disturbing stories he had heard about the woods, and they started sending shivers down his spine.

‘Well, I won’t be sticking around here for very long,’ he mumbled, glancing from left to right. ‘Half an hour tops and I’m going home.’ A fresh layer of perspiration formed on his brow. There seemed to be something sinister about these woods, not something you could say for sure, but evil seemed to lurk here.

Fifteen minutes had passed. Smearing the sweat from his forehead into his scruffy red hair, Philip peered behind the old oak tree, checking once again to see if Frank was anywhere to be seen. Thock!! In an instant Philip came crashing to the ground like a bag of cement, knocked out stone cold.

Chapter 3

Mathias was a tall being with long straight jet-black hair, coloured in between with blue streaks. He resembled your average wizard with his long nails, thick pointy snout, bent slightly to the left side, and a fine black moustache. He had long ears, also pointed on the ends, and his bright green eyes were like those of a cat, with a dark piercing stare that turned the whole room to ice. He wore a fine black silk robe with a wide light blue edging, which almost matched the colour of the stripes in his hair. His shoes were made of thick black leather and came to a pointed end. The way you could distinguish him from other dark wizards was that he had a black “M” tattooed at an angle across his cheek, which had become slightly faded over time. Most importantly, he was rotten to the core.

He had a dark underground shaft for a home, which lay deep enough beneath the ground to accommodate fairly comfortable living quarters, although most would have called it a jail or a tomb rather than a home, for that matter. A rope ladder hung down from the entrance into a fairly large room, like the main lounge area, although not nearly as cosy as one should be. Instead this room was used to brew a variety of concoctions for some evil and destructive cause.

Further along the way, down the dark stagnant passage, stood a room on the left containing all sorts of strange wizardry contraptions: an empty hatstand with hooks that glowed a luminous shiny blue colour; next to that stood a small drum set with one stick softly tapping away at one of the drums all by itself. On the floor close to the entrance lay a pair of blue denim jeans, quite a large pair at that, which hovered slightly above the ground, and flapped about as if they were being blasted by a fan.

In the far corner stood a birdcage with three canaries frozen in mid flight; no doubt, just another one of his experiments that the animal anti-cruelty league might have had something to say about. Suspended from the ceiling were three large crystal balls, each filled with an array of colourful butterflies with wings that

magically changed colour every time they were flapped.

Other than that, sitting in the opposite corner was a large box closed at the top with a zip – a very unusual collection of experiments that he had discarded for later scrutiny.

Further down the passage to the right were two padlocked steel doors. These rooms were used to store his deadly potions. At the far left hand corner of this underground dwelling were two large cages positioned next to each other in an “L” shape.

In the cage on the left Philip lay unconscious on a prickly bed of straw. It was pitch dark and reeked with an unpleasant pungent musty underground odour. A few hours had passed since school, and Philip’s mother would most surely be worrying about him by then, having no idea of the mess her beloved son had got himself into.

* * * * *

Philip stirred. ‘Snort, huh what!’ he exclaimed, blinking his eyes rapidly in an effort to adjust to the frightening darkness. ‘Ouch, my head hurts! Where the hell am I? Have I gone blind?’

The confused boy held his throbbing head, having absolutely no idea why it hurt the way it did, and desperately hoped someone would answer him soon.

‘Frank, is that you? Have you got me locked in your garage or something?’

Several seconds passed...

‘Frank, this is not a joke, where are you?’ Philip called, sounding almost frantic.

‘Birch, is that you?’ Frank piped from nowhere, sounding half dazed. ‘How did you lock me up like this Birch? Where the hell are we? And why did you beat me over the head?’

The hairs on Philip’s neck stood on end at the sound of Frank’s voice, frightened yet relieved at the same time, thinking he was at Frank’s house and not taken hostage somewhere.

‘What do you mean, where are we? We’re at your house, of course.’

‘Birch, if this is some kind of joke I’ll bash your brains in, you twit; now let me out of here,’ Frank barked in rage, clutching his aching head. ‘How dare you beat me over the head. When I catch you I’m going to beat the crap out of you!’

After a brief session of fruitless squabbling, the boys finally came to the realization that they had both been knocked unconscious in the woods, and taken captive by someone.

The cages were dark and uncomfortable and the sound of scuttling rats could

be heard nearby. Frank and Philip felt sick to the stomach at the thought of being abandoned in a dark dingy hole like caged animals. There was a constant dripping sound coming from somewhere nearby, and the air was filled with the odour of something that had been dead for quite some time.

After a short while the boys grew tolerant of the recurring stink, and their eyes adjusted slightly to the dense blackness. After a lengthy silence they eventually started talking about the things that had gone on in the classroom earlier that day. Frank was rather surprised when he found out that the eraser thrown in the classroom wasn't actually intended for him in the first place.

'Well I guess that was my temper getting the better of me,' he said sheepishly. 'If I had only stopped to listen to you for a moment, we would never have been in this mess in the first place.'

'Never mind,' Philip said, tapping his head dismally on the steel bars of his cage. 'You had every right to be angry; I would have most probably reacted the same way myself.'

A few hours had passed, and faint sobbing could be heard coming from Frank's cage. Philip, although rather shaky himself, was surprised to hear the school boxing champion crying his eyes out in the corner. He groped about in the dark fumbling for Frank's hand through his cage. He reached forwards slowly and stroked his fingers. 'Frank, are you okay? There is no need to cry; we will get out of this mess, I promise!'

Feeling terribly embarrassed, Frank sniffed and wiped the tears from his cheek.

'Do you really think so?' he croaked, trying his best to keep it together.

'I'm quite certain that everything is going to be just fine,' Philip lied, patting Frank reassuringly on his arm.

* * * * *

A jingling noise could be heard coming down the passage as someone approached them, sounding unpleasantly jolly.

'Mara kekatra, la vinta ketreat!,

'There's a smell in the air of schoolboy meat!'

'Let's stop with the twisted poetry for a moment,' Mathias rambled in his sickening voice, 'it's important for me to meet my guests first.'

The boys shook in fright, and their knees rattled together like a jackhammer. Who on earth could this dreadful creature be? He sounded like nothing the boys

had ever heard before.

The next moment a tall, bold character stood before them, with a dreadful face and eyes that could bore holes into your very being. The wizard held up a large bright kerosene lamp, and shone it into their faces to take a closer look.

‘Well, well, what have we here?’ he asked, examining them carefully. ‘Schoolchildren, soft, succulent schoolboys!’

‘You do realize of course that these are my woods?’ he barked, flashing his filthy teeth like a snarling dog. ‘Don’t you?’ He leaned towards Philip in a threatening manner, and poked the poor boy on the chin with his index fingernail.

Philip fell over backwards onto his harsh straw bedding, clutching his face in shock. The sting was terrible; blood oozed from his chin and drizzled down his neck.

‘Come on, sit up straight, feeble schoolboy, I’m talking to you!’ the evil wizard snapped, making his presence all the more unbearable. Philip obeyed his orders and sat upright as straight as a post. Mathias was pleased with his fearfully obedient response to his command, and continued to lecture the two. ‘Stepping into my woods is trespassing, and for trespassing there is a rather unfortunate price to pay. It looks like the two of you have kindly volunteered for experimentation,’ he hissed; then his face transformed into a wicked grin.

The boys could not believe what they had just seen and heard. This was far worse than they could ever have imagined. This man was on a par with some kind of a sick psychopath you only heard about on the evening news. A vision from your darkest nightmare.

He then produced a fairly large bag of peanuts from his coat, and poured a few handfuls into the containers provided at the side of the cages. ‘How on earth am I supposed to survive on these rations?’ Philip wondered. ‘I’m absolutely starving. Imagine how poor Frank is going to suffer, with the enormous appetite he has.’

‘You see, I’m not really such a monster, my friends,’ the wizard chuckled, enjoying their puzzled expressions. ‘I will see to it that you both have adequate food to eat, not to worry.’

‘*Ke bo brika la set rot hent vi lange!*’ He began muttering to himself in a foreign language.

‘The pair of you are about to experience a change!’

‘Lest tra mentok see mut ke lun keys!’

‘Two schoolboys transformed into a pair of monkeys!’

As Mathias completed his weird rhyme, he produced a bottle of steaming pink

liquid, and sprayed it evenly over the two boys. They gasped in fright, trying their best to remove the disgusting pink stuff from their faces by wiping their cheeks with handfuls of smelly straw.

It was unfortunately too late for that; Philip was already sprouting hair all over his body. Frank looked horrified at Philip, then he also began to sprout thick tufts of monkey hair. The boys soon shrank down to size; monkey ears and noses became evident, until finally they each grew a soft sleek furry tail. The school clothes they were wearing disappeared, and they both sat completely naked.

They stared at each other in horror, not quite believing what they had just seen. They sat clutching their hairy bodies, feeling miserable and uncomfortable in their nakedness.

Mathias leaned against the wall and bellowed with laughter. 'Don't worry, you boys aren't really nuts, but you will as sure as hell enjoy eating them. Now the pair of you are proper animals in cages, so taking care of you shouldn't be too much of a problem, if you know what I mean?' The evil wizard returned to the main room, and left them in the darkness to dwell in their misery.

They breathed a sigh of relief as he departed, and patted their soft hairy bodies all over in disbelief.

'This has to be a nightmare Frank; there is just no way that this could possibly be real.'

'Wizards are fairy stories!' Frank blurted, 'this can't be real, it's impossible.'

'Don't worry, Frank, we'll wake up soon, then all this nonsense will be over with.'

Time passed very slowly, and they were finding it more and more difficult to distinguish between day and night.

'Frank, don't you think our parents will send a search party out to look for us?'

'That's all very well Philip, and what are they going to be looking for? Certainly not a pair of monkeys.'

'You do have a point. At least we are talking monkeys though. Like our parents would ever believe something so ridiculous.'

'Right, we've got no chance.'

'Tell me Frank, why don't you call me Birch anymore?'

'Well, I guess I'm calling you by your first name 'cause I think that we're kind of friends now; what do you say?'

'Definitely, I'm your man. Paws up!' Philip replied, and gave Frank a furry high five.

'Philip, why don't we join the circus when we get out of here? Think of all the

money we'll make! The two talking monkeys, how does that sound?'

'Great idea, we'll make millions.'

* * * * *

The boys lay spread out over the coarse straw, feeling rather depressed at the thought of being circus animals. Philip gave a small monkey yawn.

'What time do you think it is Frank? I'm feeling awfully tired, and if this is all supposed to be a dream, I'm definitely not waking from it, unless you can fall asleep in your sleep.'

'It must be night-time. I'm also a bit dozy. Forget about the dream theory Philip; as ridiculous as it may seem, this is reality, my friend.'

The boys, or should I say monkeys, lay awake chatting and eating nuts, and soon afterwards they were both sound asleep, with no idea of what the future had in store.

Chapter 4

It was eight in the evening and the hunting dogs were barking frantically up ahead. There was a search party of about twenty fathers of Senton High School pupils out that night. They were frantically searching for Philip and Frank, who were last seen running towards the woods earlier that day.

Robert had told his mother about the disagreement between Philip and Frank during school, and explained to her which way they had run. Later on that evening, Philip's mother called Robert's mother to find out where on earth her son was. After a thoroughly unsuccessful neighbourhood search, it was concluded that they must have gone off into the woods somewhere.

Searchlights combed the trees and wild vegetation, and the dogs howled, searching desperately for fresh human scent. As the search party moved deeper into the woods, the faint sounds of excited dogs and shouting people could be heard inside Mathias's shaft. He stood by his entrance, and squirted a magical pine forest spray over the entrance flap.

'These foolish people, do they really think there is any chance of finding what they're looking for in these woods?' Mathias rattled, after having cleverly disguised the scent of his home.

Philip stirred, grabbing his tail with a startled jump.

'Frank!' he called, standing firmly pressed against his cage. Frank jumped up, alarmed by the noise outside.

'I think we're saved,' Philip announced in excitement. 'That must be our families coming to look for us.'

'No need to get excited!' a voice boomed down the passage. 'After all, they aren't looking for a pair of monkeys, remember, they are looking for two young boys!'

Mathias gave a spine-chilling cackle, leaving the two boys startled and dismayed. They realized then that they truly were doomed.

After a long period of excited barking and loud talking, things went dismally

quiet.

The boys sat down feeling frustrated and unsure of ever returning home safely as two normal human beings. They both lay back on the straw with their paws behind their heads, surrounded by silence and smothering darkness. Philip started crying; this couldn't possibly be happening to them. Frank lay still, not uttering a word. His eyes were also tear-stained, and he had very little encouragement left to offer. After an exhausting day, the two of them soon fell sound asleep once again.

Chapter 5

Buzzzzzz was the sound zipping in and out of the trees. ‘He-he,’ Zen chuckled in a squeaky dotty pitch, ripping the bark off the side of a tree as he zapped past. ‘Bounce, bounce, bounce,’ Zet went, zipping up and down, dissolving his way through a pile of leaves as he flew. Zip cruised straight forward swaying gently from side to side, resembling a ball of liquid mercury, transforming into a variation of zooty colours – a sneaky fun trio mastering in colour intelligence, pure and true in their creation. Yes, these masters of magical tricks were none other than the Malco trio, who carried a good solid reputation amongst the creatures of the wood.

The Malco trio were made from the finest magical ingredients, each with their own bubbling personality. They appeared quite plain when seen from a distance, having no facial features or dangling legs and arms. They were quite simply living balls of energy, loaded with lots of life and fun, never spotted by a person before. Even if they were analysed in a laboratory, very little was there to actually discover; the underlying factor was quite simply magic!

Zip flung herself towards a nearby tree, ricocheting straight back onto another at an incredible speed. Very soon, Zen and Zet joined in on the fun, bouncing after her at an amazing speed. ‘Bing bong bang bing bing bing.’ Squeaky voices of laughter and excitement could be heard as the three balls bounced from tree to tree. Watching them from a distance, they looked something like a pinball machine gone wrong, with the three balls slamming against objects in the woods as if they were about to strike a jackpot at any minute.

Suddenly a branch cracked nearby causing them to freeze in mid-flight, and bringing their fun to a grinding halt.

* * * * *

A dark presence was evident, looming somewhere in the near vicinity. Below them

stood none other than Mathias the wizard with a large pistol that oozed luminous yellow goo. He resembled some kind of a wicked space creature about to annihilate the innocent victim. He chanted something under his breath as he leapt forward, attempting to squirt the trio with his toxic goo. He hated them with all his being. The pistol he carried contained poison especially prepared for the destruction of the Malco balls. He leaped forward in anger, disappointed with being discovered. He shoved the sticky pistol forward, squirting the yellow liquid into the air in an effort to spray the alerted trio. But they were too fast for him; they zipped smartly up a tree and blended instantly with the surroundings, safely out of harm's reach. He flung his pistol down in rage.

'Where have you disappeared to now, you pesky balls?' he grunted, glaring through the trees.

'When I finally catch you, I'm going to turn all three of you into lovely shiny useless marbles!' he raged, waving his fist. 'And I will most definitely catch you, you can count on that, silver goons, you can count on it!'

Mathias knew he was wasting his time and marched off back to his lair. 'Next time I won't be on foot, I'll catch you in flight,' he muttered, clenching his long fingernails into his palms, causing them to bleed.

* * * * *

The Malcos hastily spun off.

'Zip, we have to be more careful in future; we can't afford to take a chance like that again,' Zen rattled, sounding quite shaken.

'I realize that Zen! Why should I get all the blame? Because I'm a lady?' Zip squeaked indignantly, spinning to the front.

'Don't start that Zip, please! You are the one that spun off like that in the beginning, that's all I'm trying to say!'

Zip and Zen continued arguing for some time, which was starting to give Zet a terrible ball ache. Zet spun in front, bobbing up and down in frustration. 'Please stop arguing for goodness sake,' he pleaded, 'it was no one's fault; we're all to blame and we just need to be more careful in future.'

Zen and Zip immediately stopped squabbling and looked at Zet in surprise.

Zet was very reserved and only ever spoke when it was absolutely necessary, otherwise he simply followed orders. Zen was more of a leader and liked taking charge over a situation. Zip was a real lady and always had to have her say like most women do. Other than that the trio worked together as a good team, well at

least most of the time they did.

The three Malco balls headed home, which lay on the very far outskirts of the woods.

Zen cried out with a shrill squeak, suddenly intercepting a magical message, 'Formation time in progress!'

They spun into formation, positioning themselves into an evenly spaced, floating triangle.

Once the triangle was perfectly formed, each of them projected a beam of light towards each other. The light formed a solid tube of twisting rainbow colour, shining brightly like an encounter with an alien spaceship. The triangle of light hovered for a moment, gaining perfect form, then it gently settled to the ground. Once the triangle had landed, the three colourful bars of light projected a surge of dazzling radiant colours upwards, linking together at a point, and forming a large brightly coloured pyramid of light. The dazzling light gradually faded as the Malcos decreased the energy flow, and finally disappeared altogether.

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Left standing there was a great being who radiated truth and resembled all that was pure. His brilliant blue eyes shone like liquid gold that spoke of great wisdom and peace. He had a long mane of wispy white hair, with a touch of gold. His beard was the same wispy white, only slightly coarser and with a dash of grey. His face was pale with a touch of red in the cheeks, showing his age in fine wrinkled lines. He had a large, crooked, pointy nose and long pointy ears. He was dressed in a dark ivy green robe with brown trimmings. He wore pointy brown leather shoes and carried a staff, made from century old oak. Chimzen the wizard was a peacekeeper, with a great love for the woods and all the little animals that lived in it.

He stretched his palm out towards the trio, and they responded in seconds, leaping onto their master's hand. They were definitely his most magnificent creations; not at all surprising Mathias so desperately wanted them destroyed. The Malcos were the good wizard's main method of transportation, used to teleport him from place to place. They could fly off to almost any place they were assigned, allowing him easy access to wherever he wanted to go.

The wizard stepped forward with the Malco trio neatly tucked inside his pocket. He would often take walks during the day, checking on the general wellbeing of things. The woods had become very quiet over the past few years, ever since Mathias had decided to take up residence there. The little animals that



once inhabited the place were rapidly becoming a thing of the past; not even a rat could be found creeping through the grass; even the sound of birds chirping in the trees had disappeared. He shook his head in dismay, his heart saddened by his cousin's destructive behaviour.

Mathias used them for experimentation, for his own selfish gain, and now they were all hiding in fear of their lives. They sensed his sickening presence, which infected the woods like a plague, and they kept themselves well out of sight. Hundreds of the small creatures ran across the streets in a desperate effort to escape from that dark place, and many had been flattened to death by the oncoming traffic.

This explained why Senton Village council saw it necessary to erect a wall all the way around the woods. Before there would be the odd badger or squirrel running astray, and ending up in the street, but nothing quite like this.

Chimzen strolled on, finding the silence more and more disturbing. Deep in thought, he slowly raised a hand to rub his coarse beard. 'There must be something I can do to put an end to my cousin's destructive behaviour. Surely there must be a way I could expel his treachery from this place.' The problem was, as far as he knew, no real crime had been committed other than cruelty to animals. Being the fair wizard he was, walking in truth and always doing what was considered right, he really had no valid argument to challenge Mathias's actions.

What made the situation worse was that Mathias was using poor monkeys and squirrels as live moving puppets and selling them to his brother Mathick, a druid in Asia. He would freeze the poor creatures with one of his dreadful potions, and magically move the body parts up and down, making them respond to a clap or a whistle. The moving puppets looked so real that no one could resist them. They were taking Asia by storm, making Mathias an extremely wealthy man.

He believed that there was nothing better than the real thing, and developed many clever ideas with the use of his wicked creative streak – frogs that jumped up and down, croaking when pressed on the nose; a pair of beautiful lovebirds flying in a perfect circle, without the need of a cage; a rat that stood on its nose at the snap of a finger, spinning around like a top, and so the list went on. Poor little animals suffering continuous abuse.

* * * * *

Chimzen was aware of many of his cousin's deceitful schemes and greatly disliked his treacherous ways; however, he was completely unaware of his latest antics.

Mathias was up to something terrible, of which you may have some idea already.



Due to the shortage of furry creatures in the woods, he replaced them with human subjects. The evil wizard took great pleasure in the capture of schoolboys who had wandered into the woods. They made the finest magical monkeys, equipped with a human voice box. Not only did they bounce up and down while playing a small set of drums, but they also sang the most beautiful songs. Young schoolboys possessed some of the finest voices. These monkeys would fetch an exceptionally large sum of money, and were seen as particularly rare.

Recently two boys from Senton High (other than Philip and Frank) had also gone missing, appearing in the “child missing” column in the local newspaper. According to the report, the boys had wandered into the woods on a Saturday morning to do a spot of birdwatching, and neither of them had been seen since. They searched Senton Woods for weeks, and the only thing ever found was a pair of binoculars with one broken lens. The whole incident was put down to kidnapping, which wasn’t too far wrong. If only the search party had known, the boys had been there the entire time. Well I guess those poor children are busy tapping drums and singing lullabies somewhere in Asia right now. If Chimzen had been aware of any of this, he would have most certainly taken serious action against his evil cousin.

As he continued with his walk, he noticed a very faint footprint in the sand, with clearly defined sole ridges, like the print a shoe with a plastic sole would make. The shoe impression appeared like it had been formed by a fairly small shoe. He leaned over and scraped up some of the soil shaped by the tread, and carefully placed it into his left hand pocket.

He quickly looked up, alerted by barking dogs and men shouting in the distance.

‘I wonder what’s going on? Sounds like a search party,’ he muttered, peering through the trees to his right. ‘Just as I suspected. I wonder who’s missing? Maybe this search has something to do with the shoe print I’ve just seen.’

Chimzen reached into his pocket, and brought the Malco trio out. They chuckled excitedly, always ready for action.

‘Home, Malco trio!’ he roared, thrusting them into the air. In a second the trio were flying like a bullet in between the trees, off to the far end of the woods, up the tall old pepper tree which extended far higher than any other, and into the quaint old tree house where their master lived. They completed their colourful pyramid of light formation, in preparation for his return. Chimzen waited patiently for them to teleport him home. In a short space of time he vanished and promptly reappeared in the comfort of his home.

Chapter 6

The boys sat trembling in their dark cages, wondering what this evil man was going to do with them. Once again faint barking noises could be heard from outside. The sounds grew louder, until the voices of men calling their names could be heard. Once again Mathias sprayed the entrance to his gloomy abode, disguising any scent which might attract the hunting dogs. Philip and Frank were excited all over again, in the hope that they would soon be found. Realizing once again that they were a pair of monkeys, they collapsed on their furry butts and let out dismal sighs.

‘We really don’t stand a chance, do we Frank?’ Philip asked, his voice trembling.

‘I think we are well and truly doomed!’ Frank replied, ready to give up all hope.

‘There must be a way out of this, Frank! We have to try and escape the first chance we get!’

‘I agree Philip. The only thing that worries me is even if we do escape, does your family really need a pet monkey?’

‘You’re right, it looks like we’ll be eating bananas and peanuts for the rest of our lives.’

‘What if this wicked man wants to make monkey stew out of us? Or what if he sells us to the circus?’

‘Don’t talk like that Philip, you’re giving me the bleeding creeps! We have to get out of this maggot hole somehow. There simply has to be a way!’

The boys had no idea how really bleak their future looked. Their only chance of survival was to escape from Mathias.

The determined shouting and frantic barks of an exhausted search party soon died down to a cold disturbing silence. The boys were deeply saddened, fumbling in the straw with their tiny hands like poor animals taken from their mothers and shipped off to the circus. They had to escape from this treacherous man no matter what the cost.

* * * * *

Shortly after the search party retired from their search, a jingling noise could be heard coming down the passage. The boys sprang to their feet, clutching onto the bars with tiny monkey paws.

‘What’s that?’ Frank screeched in fright. Before Philip could reply, a voice came booming down the passage.

‘It’s your old friend Mathias, the zookeeper, coming to fetch his two hairy friends! Are the peanut eaters ready for some monkey business this morning?’ he cackled, placing his lamp neatly between the two cages.

The boys shuffled to the back bars, two little hearts thumping in panic. Mathias leaned forward, and produced a small bundle of keys. He carefully unlocked Philip’s cage. At the same time he produced two small chains with shackles on either end, which he had neatly clipped to a thick leather belt around his waist. He wore a thick pair of leather gloves, just in case one of the two decided to use their animal instincts and take a bite.

‘Come to me my little friend, let’s go and have some fun.’ He grinned at Philip, displaying a set of filthy yellow teeth, overjoyed at the look of terror on the poor monkey boy’s face. He grabbed one of Philip’s legs and clamped it with a shackle in a matter of seconds.

He proceeded to the next cage. Unlocking it first, he leaned forward, attempting to shackle one of Frank’s reluctant paws as well. Frank stood upright on his hind legs in boxing position. As Mathias leaned forward, he began swinging vicious little monkey punches towards the wizard, his small monkey hands lashing out in desperation. Unfortunately for Frank, punching Mathias with his little paws was like whacking a door with a feather duster. All his skill and technique as the school boxing champion were of no use to him this time, being the small creature with tiny paws he now was.

Mathias groped about the straw and grabbed Frank brutally by a leg. He swiftly yanked the boxing champion off his feet, and proceeded to clamp his leg firmly with a shackle.

‘So you think you are strong hey? I will show you what strong is, you useless peanut eater!’ he barked, grinding his filthy fangs. Raising his right hand, he slapped Frank brutally across the face.

‘That will teach you a lesson, you miniature baboon!’

Frank fell over backwards onto the straw, clutching at his face in pain. His head was so sore that it felt like it would explode at any minute. The poor boy felt really sorry he had ever challenged the evil wizard.

Mathias marched down the passage, dragging Philip and Frank along like vermin to the slaughter. Frank held his aching cheek, feeling a bit disorientated and confused with the unusual feeling of walking like a monkey.

‘Don’t try and fight with me; you will only make things difficult for yourselves. If you simply behave we can get this over with as quickly and efficiently as possible,’ Mathias lectured, approaching the main entrance hall.

‘Get what over with exactly?’ Philip and Frank wondered.

Mathias was in the process of transforming them into a pair of singing drummer monkeys, which required a lot of skill and concentration. A process far more complicated than turning them into mere monkeys.

Some time ago when he had originally started experimenting with schoolboys, he had experienced great difficulty in transforming them into monkeys, never mind drummer monkeys. After endless days and nights of frustrating experimentation he had finally succeeded. Now, according to him, even a monkey could get it right. When he first started with his evil magic, the schoolboys were turning out with human legs, monkey heads and bodies, or complete monkey bodies with a human head. With much determination he had persevered with his monkey-cross-schoolboy experiment until finally he had it perfected. The only unfortunate thing was that he had absolutely no idea of how to change the monkeys back to schoolboys. That wasn’t a problem for him, though; after all, why should he ever need to change them back?

He stood in the main room at the entrance of his underground shaft. It was very dark except for a bit of light shining in through the entrance. There was a fairly large round steel table in the centre of the room, with six steel chairs. It was hard to believe that anyone associated themselves with this man, let alone came for a visit. Everything was painted black, and the only ornament in the room was a little canary sitting on a perch, hanging from the ceiling over the steel table. Mathias had a large wooden table on which he worked, positioned in the far corner of the room.

The two monkeys were shackled to a leg of one of the steel chairs, while Mathias got on with final preparations.

In the meantime, Frank and Philip climbed up and down the chair to get a good feel for their new monkey bodies. Although very scared, and having no idea what this wicked man was up to, they weren’t prepared to just sit back like lambs for the slaughter.

Behind the table on a ledge stood a long line of candles, which lit the table brightly. The flickering candles created weird shadows on the walls of the room, giving the place an eerie feeling. On the far end of the large table lay a variety of colourful bubbling mixtures, set up in glass flasks, each one bubbling at a different

rate, which gave the impression that each one was boiling at different temperatures.

In front of these colourful concoctions, sitting on a stand, stood a very large black book displaying large black Gothic text. This was Mathias's book of black magic, filled with terrible spells of death. Lastly, in front lay a rubber mat, just the right fit for a squirrel or a monkey. At each corner of this mat lay a small chain and shackle, enabling Mathias to clamp down a creature firmly during its transformation process. Scattered over the left side of the table were a variety of herbs, leaves and roots. Above those lay a sealed flask, containing a variety of slugs and bugs. Besides that, many other natural bits and pieces could be found, freshly picked from the woods, used as a final touch for one or other potion.

The boys chatted quietly together while he continued with his preparations. The evil wizard paged through his magic book, running his long index nail up and down the pages. Finding the required chapter of misery he ranted to himself in a strange language. Reaching for the bottle of slugs and bugs, he carefully removed the lid and pulled out a long centipede, then quickly replaced the lid, before any of the other slimy creatures could escape. The centipede wriggled between his fingers while he chanted. His eyes gleamed demonically in the flickering light. The centipede was carefully placed into one of the flasks filled with a green mixture, which appeared to be bubbling very slowly. Once the centipede was fully immersed, the green mixture began to bubble rapidly. The centipede disappeared into the green solution, which continued to bubble like raw chips in a deep fryer.

Mathias cried out in excitement, 'That's it, the final touch, now I'm ready for the two fur balls!' He turned around looking Frank and Philip up and down with a sinister smile. They were seated on the edge of the chair with eyes wide as saucers, having no idea what he was up to. They only hoped and prayed that their plan was going to work.

Frank sat near the edge of the steel chair; he was quite a bit older than Philip and appeared to be the larger monkey of the two, with his head sticking out a couple of inches higher than Philip's. Mathias confronted the boys, his face alight with glee. He raised his hands and clenched his fingers inwards, then pierced them forward in a threatening manner. The candlelight created dark shift shadows around him, making him look like a hideous beast. Frank gulped as he approached.

'Let's not be in such a hurry,' he rumbled in an eerie voice, reaching down to the floor for his gloves, and carefully slipping them on over his sharp talons. 'We can't have one of you critters infecting me with rabies, now can we?'

'So you'll be first then?' he asked Frank, not bothering to wait for an answer. Reaching to his side for the keys, he carefully unlocked Frank's shackle, and yanked him up roughly by his paws. He flung him onto the rubber mat like a rag

doll, sprawling him out over the table.

‘There we go, that’s a good hair ball!’ he cackled, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

The moment Frank’s paws were released, he flung them forward into Mathias’s grinning face, aiming straight for the eyeballs. He launched them forward with boxing accuracy, sinking his razor sharp monkey nails into the green snake eyes of the enemy, causing the wicked wizard to shriek in agony. He toppled to the floor, groaning in excruciating pain, with his hands cupped over his face. In seconds, Frank unclipped the keys from his leather belt and fumbled frantically over Philip’s shackle.

‘Hurry Frank, he’s crawling towards us!’ Philip shouted, jumping anxiously up and down on the chair.

‘When I catch you, I am going to kill the pair of you!’ Mathias roared, slithering towards them like a serpent. Frank endeavoured to remain calm as he tried each key, only testing the ones small enough to fit the shackles. There were many keys to check on the unusually large bunch though, and Frank wasn’t having too much success.

Mathias slid closer, groping for the top of the chair with his leather mitt.

‘You can’t escape me, you mangy parasites! How dare you even try?’ he roared, fumbling blindly for the chair.

Philip jumped up and down in panic. Mathias had both hands placed on the steel chair, and would very soon have him in his clutches.

‘Just leave me here Frank; run away before we both get caught!’ Philip yelled in desperation.

‘Not a chance! I am not leaving you here alone with this devil,’ he replied, determined to find the key.

‘Now I’ve got you!’ Mathias roared, stretching forward. Desperate, Philip leaped onto his head, and bit his pointy ear. He screamed out in pain, reaching up to grab Philip as he fell backwards onto the floor. Philip bounced smartly back onto the chair, not really believing what he had just done. Click, the lock opened, much to Frank’s relief.

‘Let’s go Philip, before we get caught!’ he yelled, bounding towards the exit. Mathias rolled on the floor, holding his head in agony. The boys shot up the ladder like lightning, dashing between the trees as fast as their monkey legs would carry them. They needed to disappear as far out of sight as possible, even though they had absolutely no idea where they were going.

* * * * *

‘Where are we, Frank?’

‘I’m not sure, Philip. I’ve never been this far into the woods before.’

‘Well, it doesn’t really matter which way we go, but we’d better run before that evil man comes after us.’

‘Let’s go this way,’ Frank said, pointing to a large clump of dense trees. ‘Seeing that we’re a pair of monkeys, trees should be the quickest form of transportation I would think.’ They headed towards the clump of trees, very surprised by their own speed and agility. Frank approached a large tree trunk and climbed it with ease, his small monkey paws and feet taking a nice firm hold on the bark. Philip followed after him, taking to it just as easily as his friend had. Very soon the two were cruising through the woods at an alarming rate, bouncing from tree to tree like a proper pair of monkeys.

‘This is great fun!’ Philip shouted, landing on a branch next to Frank.

‘Absolutely magic!’ Frank cried, leaping wildly into the air. The boys were having the time of their lives and soon forgot all about Mathias. They really weren’t all that worried anyway; they must have travelled miles from his seedy den by then.

Suddenly an all too familiar voice boomed down from above, ‘So you think you can escape from me hey? You pair of nitwits!’ They froze in mid-flight, absolutely horrified. Landing on a branch, they turned their heads to see where the voice was coming from. Mathias hovered victoriously above them dressed in a large pair of magical blue hover jeans, with his robe tucked neatly inside. He had a very sharp sense of smell and could pick up the scent of a monkey a mile away. His face shone red with rage; his eyes even though still very bloodshot, protruded from their sockets like daggers.

‘When I catch you boys, I’m going to cut your tails off! How dare anyone make a fool out of Mathias?’

Down he swooped after them like a vulture on a decaying carcass. He had a nice long whip coiled over his right shoulder, which he used to catch small animals. He was an absolute master with his whip and never went hunting without it.

Frank and Philip ran for their lives, bolting down the tree to the turf below. They zigzagged in between trees, desperately trying to escape his grasp.

Mathias flew after them, laughing like a maniac, ducking in and out of the tree trunks with his whip held ready for the catch. Frank ran ahead, showing stamina Philip didn’t possess. Philip could feel himself starting to tire; his poor little heart was taking serious strain; keeping up with his friend would not be possible any longer. Crash, down came the whip, skimming past his ear, leaving the poor monkey boy in a state of sheer panic. Once again the whip crashed down, only this time it wrapped itself neatly around his neck.

‘I’ve got you now, you furry runaway!’ Mathias cackled, jerking him back with his whip. Philip went flying backwards like a stray dog caught by the pound, and his heart nearly exploded with shock. In a second, Mathias reeled him in and shoved him into a big black bag. Landing inside, the poor boy clutched at his neck, gasping for air, half strangled to death.

‘That will teach you for playing games with me, you little rat! Now let’s go and collect your rodent friend,’ he complained, whistling off after his next victim.

Frank looked back to see where Philip was, but there was no sign of him. ‘I really hope he’s okay,’ he thought as he ambled on, totally unaware of what was hovering directly above.

Once again the whip came crashing down; unlike with Philip, this time Mathias didn’t miss at his first attempt. The whip coiled itself neatly around Frank’s neck and jerked him backwards viciously, almost ripping his little monkey head off. Mathias grabbed Frank brutally by the tail, and shoved him into the bag.

‘Well I guess that’s the lot then, and just when I was starting to have a bit of fun,’ he said, sounding half disappointed. ‘Don’t even dare try another stunt like that again, peanut brains; next time I won’t be quite so forgiving.’ He tied the bag up tightly, tossing it over his shoulder, and casually flew back to his underground lair.

* * * * *

On their return, the boys were thrown into a single cage together. Mathias carefully tied them both up back to back. Making sure that they didn’t pull any stunts, he proceeded to tie their arms and legs together.

‘My potions take forever to set up, and now they have all gone stale. Looks like I will have to start all over again tomorrow, you hairy pests!’ he complained, brutally twisting Frank’s ear.

Frank cringed in pain, a bit surprised that he hadn’t caused them any other serious harm. The wizard would have tortured them both with pleasure, but he knew that they had to be well preserved if they were to be a perfect pair of drummer monkeys, that could fetch him a large sum of money.

‘Night-night, fur balls, don’t let the cage creatures bite!’ he cackled, disappearing down the passage and leaving them behind in complete darkness once again.

Frank and Philip sat very uncomfortably, unable to move a limb. They were absolutely starved from all the pointless running. Mathias had also very kindly emptied their little food bowls in a spiteful attempt at teaching them a lesson. This time they knew all hope was lost, and that they were surely doomed.

Chapter 7

Chimzen's home was situated along the outskirts of the woods, near the top of an enormous pepper tree that stretched high up into the sky, far above all the others. Unlike Mathias's gloomy dungeon, radiant sunlight flooded into his tree house, which possessed lovely Cape style cottage windows on two sides. The entrance door was rounded at the top, made from slats of old weathered oak. It had a lovely brass doorknob with a sculptured lizard moulded around it, which looked so real that you would almost expect it to dash across the door at any moment. The ceiling appeared very heavy, also structured with long slats of oak. In the centre of his home stood a fairly large, round stinkwood table, very rugged and unpolished. Around the table stood six matching chairs, each one beautifully carved at the back with a picture of a small animal from the woods. The table was positioned on a dark green rug with frayed edges, which gave the place a warm homely feeling. Suspended in midair below the ceiling, above the table, a large array of small planets spun around. They were completely unique, resembling a foreign solar system. To the left of the entrance stood a long desk, extending across the length of the room. It had wide sturdy legs, with four large drawers on either side, each one set with a small brass knob. The top was smooth and nicely polished. It came equipped with a solid chair, which displayed beautiful flowery carvings on the arms and back. On the opposite side of the room, bookshelves extended from the ground all the way up to the ceiling. The shelves of thick stained pine were bolted to the wall. The bookshelves were open, with many of the books suspended mystically in midair, hovering in front of the shelves.

Opposite the door, to the far end of the room, stood a large fish tank positioned on a steel table. The table had spiral steel legs, which appeared a bit unstable. The fish tank swayed gently from left to right, with water occasionally splashing over the top. The inside was set up like a circus act, with tiny suspended hoops and bars. Some of them rotated slowly in the water, similar to a dolphin aquarium. The steel bars moved up and down, creating a kind of tiny obstacle course. In the corner of

the fish tank lay a small house with two entrances. Floating magically above the fish tank was another hoop, slightly larger than the others. There was also a small platform mounted at the top corner of the tank.

The table in the corner was neat and orderly, holding a pair of spectacles, a good old-fashioned quill pen and inkpot, and a large black book used for jotting down any new and interesting ideas. Towards the back lay a large book of spells, which lay open, displaying an unusually large foreign text. Chimzen kept it tightly under lock, key and spell when not in use, making sure no one other than himself could access its power. On the right-hand side of the table lay a variety of berries, stones and leaves, as well as a large collection of glass flasks of all shapes and sizes. Only one of them was currently in use, a small one filled to the brim with a green paste, for healing injured animals. He found a poor feathered fellow earlier on that day trying its best to take off, yet only able to flap around in painful circles. A few dabs of the green goo on its broken wing, and the poor bird was as good as new in no time at all. On the far corner of the desk lay a pile of books, with the top one hovering slightly above the rest.

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Chimzen sat at his desk looking very worried, pondering over his walk in the woods earlier that day, wondering about the search party he had overheard, and the shoe print he had noticed in the sand. 'I am very sure that my wretched cousin has something to do with this,' he muttered, resting his chin on the palm of his hand.

The Malco trio were spinning around the planets suspended above the big round table, giggling amongst themselves. They were becoming quite annoying as they tapped in between the colourful planet balls.

'Will you three please be quiet?' he snapped, giving them a stern gaze. The three balls immediately stopped giggling and hovered in alarmed silence. Chimzen reached carefully into his left hand pocket, and produced some of the sand he had gathered earlier from the shoe print. He placed the soil onto the table, spreading it in a circular shape. Opening his bottom drawer, he pulled out a little bottle that contained blue liquid. Holding it well away from himself, he carefully unscrewed the cap, and the exposed liquid started hissing like deadly acid. Carefully, he poured a few drops onto the circular sand formation. The bubbling mixture instantly burst into flames, and fizzled out soon afterwards, leaving behind a lump of green sticky tar, which slowly resumed a round shape. After a few minutes the sticky round lump of tar settled and formed a bright green sand disc.

Chimzen opened his book of spells and flipped hurriedly through the pages. Stopping near the middle somewhere, he began chanting while twisting the disc with his fingers, making it spin on its edge like a coin.

*'Keez ratuz geel das tortune,
Green sand disc tell us your fortune.'*

The green disc began spinning even faster, until it appeared as though it was a solid green ball. He summoned the trio to take their positions. The three balls spun to his desk, and formed an evenly spaced triangle around the spinning disc. The three balls projected bright colourful beams towards each other, then projected them upwards to a point, forming a pyramid of light very much the same as the one used for teleporting. As the disc spun, green light projected onto the pyramid walls, appearing transparent as the sand story began to unfold.

Chimzen gazed anxiously into the pyramid. The green disc projection showed a schoolboy running through the woods. As he ran, he kept looking behind as if being followed by someone. Chimzen gazed on, watching Philip attempt to escape from Frank. Philip was standing by a large tree now, looking around to see if Frank was approaching. Suddenly he was struck over the head with a large plank. Chimzen edged forward in horror, watching his evil cousin drag the unconscious boy off to his gloomy hole.

He sat back, shaking his head in disgust.

'So that dreadful cousin of mine is using schoolboys for his evil experimentation now! This is totally unacceptable! I must put an end to this treachery!' Tapping his fingers sharply on the desk, he planned the rescue of the victims he had seen in the sand disc, hoping that only one of them had been caught. The light projected by the trio gradually grew dim and faded. The green disc stopped glowing and spun to a halt.

* * * * *

Chimzen could hear the joyful splashing of his goldfish, Elvis, by the window. He had been resting in his little house and was stirred by the vibration of his master's alarmed cries. The little fish swam in and out between the little bars and through the hoops at a mean speed. Reaching the end of the tank, he made a sharp U-turn, gained some speed and shot through the little hoop suspended in the air. Down he flew, landing back in the water with a big splash. The fish tank rocked back and forth on its springy legs, causing water to splash over the side. Elvis swam towards

his little platform in the corner, shot up in the air, and landed neatly on top of his wavy orange goldfish tail fin. Chimzen walked towards his scaly friend, clapping his hands and smiling from ear to ear.

‘Bravo Elvis! Bravo! So you managed to jump the magical hoop at last?’

‘Yes master, finally master,’ the little fish said breathlessly.

‘Good show, I knew you would get it right,’ he cheered, stroking Elvis softly on the back fin. ‘And how are you this morning my friend?’

‘I’m fine and splashy today master! I’ve just been picking up a very bad vibration inside my tank. Is there something wrong master?’ Elvis replied in his surprisingly deep voice, bouncing up and down on his tail while he spoke.

‘Mathias is up to no good again Elvis. I’m quite sure it’s nothing I can’t handle though.’

‘That man is so evil, especially with all the things he has done to small creatures like myself. It’s about time something was done to stop him.’

Chimzen leaned forward, tapping the little fish on his head. ‘Don’t you worry yourself Elvis, my scaly friend, I’ll take care of him.’

‘Yes, but you have to stop him master or...’

‘I said not to worry Elvis,’ he insisted, blocking the little fish’s mouth with his pinkie finger. ‘There is definitely something fishy about that cousin of mine, but don’t go making that your problem. Elvis will not be leaving the building; you are quite safe with me. Okay?’

‘I won’t be leaving which building?’ Elvis asked, looking very confused.

‘Never mind Elvis, never mind,’ Chimzen chuckled.

The puzzled fish did a wobbly bow, and flipped sideways into the water. He disappeared into his little house, scratching his head with his fin. ‘What building? I don’t stay in a building? What is master on about?’

Chimzen sat at his desk where the trio hovered in a slow moving circle. Giving the three balls a discerning look, he placed his hands behind his head. ‘You do realize that this is a job for the three of you?’

‘Of course!’ the trio replied, all at once, with excited squeaky voices.

‘I want you to go and visit Mathias and find out exactly what he has done with those boys. Find their exact locations so they can be teleported back here. Zen, please make sure that there is no fooling about; this mission is critical.’

‘Yes sir, we will exercise the utmost caution sir!’ Zen yelled, like a new recruit to the army obeying orders.

‘Good luck Malcos, I’ll see you later!’

* * * * *

The trio shot off like bullets, making their way to Mathias's den. Shortly, the three silver balls arrived at his gloomy abode. Simultaneously they dulled in colour, until they were sooty black in appearance. Down the ladder they spun, looking out cautiously for the evil wizard. Mathias stood muttering in the corner with his back turned, completely engrossed with the preparation of a nasty mixture. Blending perfectly with the dark surroundings, they quietly zipped off down the passage in search of the boys. It was all very well that they couldn't be seen, except for the fact that they couldn't see anything themselves. So very carefully when they were in the clear, Zen started glowing, producing just enough light to guide them through.

'Careful Zen, you'll have us all caught,' Zip whispered, panicking a bit.

'We need to see where we are going; don't worry, we just need to be very careful that's all.'

Faint whispers could be heard coming from down the passage. Frank and Philip were complaining bitterly about the ropes cutting into their small hands and feet. They were desperately miserable, ready to give up all hope of coming out alive.

Zen followed the sounds of misery, spinning up the dark passage to investigate the cage on the left. Philip shook with fright, holding back a blood-curdling yell. Frank twisted his head to face the light; having heard no footsteps, his little heart nearly jumped into his mouth.

'What's that?' Philip whispered loudly in panic.

'Don't worry my friends, we are here to help you,' Zen squeaked softly.

Frank and Philip couldn't believe their ears; this was the first time they had ever heard a talking light bulb before. The Malco trio were even more surprised when they heard the two monkeys talking, knowing that Chimzen was the only wizard capable of such magic.

'We are the Malco trio, sent by Chimzen the great wizard to save two schoolboys.'

The other two Malcos started glowing to show themselves. The two boys sat in dumbstruck silence with eyes as wide as saucers.

'We are those two schoolboys,' Frank said after a long pause, 'Mathias turned us into a pair of talking monkeys.'

'Well, that explains it then! Can you believe such treachery?' Zen exclaimed, bouncing up and down in anger.

Mathias turned to face the passage, hearing an unfamiliar sound.

The Malco trio were starting to get agitated. 'Listen here, our time is short! I

want you monkeys, I mean boys, to remain in the exact positions that you are. Try not to move for a few minutes; we're going to transport you out of here. Don't ask questions, there isn't time; just stay dead still.'

'For sure, whatever you say buddy,' Frank said, shaking his head in disbelief. 'This must be a dream Philip, it must be.'

'I dunno Frank, I just dunno.'

The Malcos flew into the cage and spun around the boys for a few seconds, pinning an exact teleport location. Then they promptly disappeared, with Zip and Zet dimming themselves and following after Zen.

As they spun down the passage, with Zen lighting the way, a large thick glass jar came crashing over the dimly lit ball, leaving him spinning inside like a terrified firefly. Mathias stood triumphant with his foot holding the jar pressed firmly to the ground.

'I've caught you, you flaming thunder ball! My goodness I've caught you indeed!' Mathias roared, hardly believing his luck. Zen sat in the jar, not at all impressed with the fool. The other two Malco balls lit up, and spun around Mathias's head like fireworks from hell. Zen glowed like a fiery coal, and zipped around the inside of the jar at such an incredible speed that it appeared as though an enormous flaming ring was hovering slightly off the ground. The glass went red hot, smouldering from the intense heat. Mathias's head and foot were straining under the heat, and then his hair caught fire. He jumped up and down in agony, slapping his blazing head to try and extinguish the flames. The jar was a hot melted mess by then and Zen slid through the molten remains like a hot knife slicing through butter. The Malcos reunited and quickly flew home, with Mathias screaming after them in rage, slapping at his smoking mess of black and blue hair. He hurriedly pulled on his flying jeans in a desperate attempt to catch the three balls. He reached for his pistol, loaded with toxic magic goo, and raced after the balls with the outrageous certainty of catching them.

A man is always considered to be as big as his temper. Maybe things would go better for Mathias if he chose not to blunder in his anger, and stopped to think for a moment.

Chapter 8

Chimzen was very pleased to see the trio return from a successful mission. The balls quickly formed a triangle on the big round table, zoning in on the two boys for teleport. Bright colours formed a triangle, reflected upwards to complete the pyramid of light. The boys sat in the dark cage feeling confused and dizzy as parts of their bodies began to fade.

‘What’s happening, Frank?’ Philip cried in confusion. ‘I can’t feel you anymore!’

‘It must have something to do with those balls; I can’t feel you either.’

The boys felt like they were spinning around in circles, while the darkness gradually turned to a dazzling white light, reflected by several bright rainbow colours. The surrounding intense brightness faded as the Malcos gradually phased out the pyramid of light. The Malco trio spun off to Chimzen’s desk and lay quietly in the corner like useless marbles. The boys’ mouths hung wide open in amazement; they were unable to grasp the reality of what had just happened to them. They sat on the big round table, gazing at Chimzen in disbelief.

The wizard stared at the two monkeys while scratching his chin, looking nearly as puzzled as they were.

‘So, are you the boys that wandered into the woods?’ Chimzen asked, not quite believing what Mathias had done. The two monkeys nodded their heads simultaneously, shrinking back in fear of this man’s awesome presence.

‘There’s nothing to fear boys; I am here to help you,’ Chimzen said. Then he paused, staring at them like he was daydreaming. ‘S-Sorry, I just can’t get over what that dreadful cousin of mine has done to you. I-It’s unspeakable. It’s near impossible to fix up a mess like this.’

‘W-Who are you, sir?’ Philip stuttered, nervously nibbling at the end of his tail.

‘Yes of course, terribly sorry, my name is Chimzen. I’m a wizard the same as Mathias, the only difference being: I look out for the good of others, while he on the other hand is self-seeking and rotten to the core. And what exactly are your names?’

‘My name is Philip and this is my friend Frank, well at least, he’s my friend now,’ Philip replied. Chimzen had a pleasantly warm way about him, and in a very short space of time the boys were feeling quite comfortable in his presence.

‘Tell me young fellows, how did the pair of you end up in the woods?’ Chimzen asked, tugging softly at his beard with two fingers, completely absorbed by what the boys had to say. Philip told the story while sitting on the edge of the table with his monkey legs dangling over, starting right from the beginning with the eraser in the classroom. Occasionally Frank would interrupt, explaining his side of the action.

‘Tut-tut, you boys had no idea of the trouble you were getting yourselves into, did you?’ Chimzen asked, shaking his head in despair. The boys shrugged their shoulders, shaking their heads in dismay.

‘Do you have any idea what Mathias was planning to do with you?’ the wizard asked, handing them each a large juicy banana. Little monkey paws eagerly reached out, thanking him for his kindness; they made short work of the bananas.

‘No, not a clue,’ Frank mumbled, raising his eyebrows as he took an oversized bite.

Chimzen grabbed one of the large wooden chairs from the round table. Letting out a sigh, he sat himself down and explained Mathias’s cruel experimentation with animals to the boys. They leaned over the table’s edge, faces expressing absolute horror.

‘Is that what he wanted to do with us?’ Philip asked, his eyes standing out on stalks. ‘Phew, we are so lucky that you saved us in time!’

Frank leaned back in shock and nearly choked on a mouthful of banana. ‘That means if we hadn’t escaped when we did, we would have been a pair of puppets by now! Thank goodness we did!’

* * * * *

Under the window by the side of the room the fish tank rocked on its springy legs, water splashing over the side. Elvis was dashing up and down over the little bars and shooting through the little hoops. He flew through the hoop in the air once again, having mastered the challenge, and landed back in the tank without a single splash. The two boys turned their heads in astonishment, gazing at the little underwater circus act in surprise. Elvis shot into the air again, this time landing smartly on his little platform in the corner.

‘Good afternoon master!’ the little fish bellowed in a deep voice.

‘Hello Elvis! I see you are making my floors wet again,’ Chimzen answered, smiling at the comical fish.

‘Sorry master,’ the little fish said shyly, ‘I can’t help it, my tank is spring loaded.’

‘Just teasing, Elvis, just teasing.’

The boys couldn’t believe their eyes; this was the first time they had ever seen a talking goldfish, never mind one with such a deep voice.

‘Boys, this is Elvis, my pet goldfish,’ Chimzen announced, stepping towards the tank. The boys climbed down the table and edged shyly towards the tank; they were slowly becoming quite accustomed to all the strange things occurring in the woods.

‘Why do you call them boys, master? They look like a pair of monkeys to me!’ Elvis asked, prancing from left to right on his tail fin like a ballerina. Chimzen explained the story briefly to Elvis, to stop him asking endless questions.

‘So your name is Elvis? And you have a deep voice?’ Frank asked, ‘Does that mean you can sing?’ Elvis leapt into the air, and did a reverse back flip back into the water, disappearing into his little house.

‘Yes he can sing, he’s just a little shy.’ Chimzen said, running his middle finger through the water. ‘He just needs a bit of an incentive I think.’

Walking towards the desk, the wizard took a small bottle of fish crumbles out of the drawer, along with a miniature six string guitar. Returning to the tank he dropped a small pinch of crumbles into the water, and tapped the glass sharply with the back end of the tiny guitar. Within seconds Elvis returned to the water surface, and greedily gobbled down the crumbles. Then Chimzen tapped the platform twice with the little guitar. Once the little fish had had enough to eat, he leaped onto the stage and clutched the little guitar between his fins like an experienced rock star ready to burn some strings. Elvis started strumming at the piece; with an unusual show of talent he projected his deep little voice and broke out in song.

‘One for the sardine, two for the sole,
One for the salmon, man go fish go,
We’re going to swim around some sharks tonight,
We’re going to dodge the jellyfish till broad daylight,
We’re going to rock around the sea urchin, crab and eel tonight.’

The two boys broke out into loud applause, clapping their little monkey hands with excitement. They were finding it very hard to believe that such a small creature could possess such a magnificent talent. Chimzen stood there beaming, and stroking the little fish proudly on his head. Elvis did a bow, going from orange to red with

all the approval. He placed the little guitar down, flipped back into the tank, did a quick run through the series of bars and hoops, and promptly disappeared into his little house.

A bit disappointed that Elvis had disappeared so soon, the boys resumed their positions on the end of the table. Chimzen placed the little guitar and the fish crumbs back in the drawer, sat down at his desk and breathed a big sigh. The boys watched him sit down and noticed the worried expression on his face.

‘What’s wrong sir? Why do you look so worried?’ Philip asked. Chimzen slowly looked up at him, taking a long while to respond to the question.

‘Let me try and explain this rather complicated procedure of magical laws young man. You see, I personally have the ability to transform animals into more intellectual beings, giving them the ability to speak and act more like humans. Mathias, however, does not possess such skills. Instead he acquires human subjects to create the same effect. That way he doesn’t have to create an animal with actual speech ability; he just simply reduces a greater being to a lesser being, maintaining their ability of speech. You see, in the world of magic, to reduce a greater being to a lesser one is a simple procedure. This is known as ‘Fregosism’ which is absolutely forbidden. This is why I am so disgusted with Mathias. His crime is so severe that he deserves to be burnt at the stake for even thinking of committing such a treacherous act.’

‘So what exactly does this ‘Freg-os-itis’ mean to us?’ Frank asked, his little monkey face going pale with shock. ‘Surely you have the power to fix things up sir?’

Chimzen sat back in his chair, reluctant to say anymore. He could see that the boys had already been through a nightmare as it was, and he didn’t wish to make the situation any worse for them.

‘Well, you see the problem with Fregosism is...’ he took a long pause, and stared blankly at the ceiling for what seemed like an eternity. ‘It is a point of no return. Basically, what I am trying to say is, once a human being is converted to an animal, there is no remedy on earth available to undo this process.’ The room was filled with cold silence.

‘Does that mean we are going to be monkeys for the rest of our lives?’ Philip cried out in horror.

‘Sadly, I’m afraid so,’ Chimzen replied, his head hanging down to his chest in sorrow.

Silence filled the room once again, and the boys felt trapped in a terrible nightmare.

‘So this means we will never see our families again, and everyone will think we’re dead,’ Philip whimpered softly, his eyes welling with tears. Frank placed his monkey hand on his friend’s shoulder, at a complete loss for words. Chimzen watched sadly as they sat with heads slumped down in misery. They so desperately wanted to be boys again. The mournful silence was painful, too much for the kind-hearted wizard to bear.

‘Okay you two, stop looking so glum, there may be a way out of this.’

‘What? You mean we might be boys again!’ Frank cried, smiling from ear to ear. Chimzen stood up and walked towards the big round table. Slowly, he raised his staff and pointed it at one of the rotating planets hovering below the ceiling. One of the spinning planet balls was a bright green colour, considerably smaller than the others.

‘Do you see this rotating green ball?’ Chimzen asked. Frank and Philip nodded in reply.

‘Well, this green ball is the entrance passage to a planet in another solar system. In fact all of these balls you see spinning here are gateways to other planets in a foreign solar system, unknown to earth.’

The boys stared in disbelief as the wizard continued with his explanation.

‘There is a secret magic herb which is the key to restoring you back to human beings. The only problem is that it can only be found on planet Floran, this small green ball over here. Floran is better known as the great planet of plants. The entire planet flourishes with plants and trees like an enormous greenhouse. Millions of years ago, or so it is told, Floran was inhabited by many other life forms as well. As time went on, the beings that inhabited this planet were annihilated through war and plagues. Eventually the plant life evolved into creeping killing machines, until all the wildlife was either destroyed or eaten by these beastly plants. Soon they dominated Floran, and now not a bird or a bug can be found anywhere.’

The wizard lowered his staff and returned to his desk, feeling half sorry he had even mentioned the place.

‘So what exactly does that mean to us?’ Frank asked, scratching his hairy head, a bit confused.

Chimzen rocked back and forth in his chair looking a bit grim. He was unsure of whether to answer the boy or just tell him to forget about everything he had just said. Finally, after clearing his throat, he reluctantly gave a reply to the pending question.

‘On this particular planet lies a very special plant. In fact, it is absolutely unique. It has a flower with silver petals and a golden centre. It is unfortunately

very rare, so may take a while to find. It is known as the magic Frego flower, and in its petal lies the secret remedy for restoring animals back to human beings.’

‘Oh, so what you are really saying is, that if we want to be people again we are going to have to go there ourselves, and there is a good chance we may never return?’ Philip asked, realizing the seriousness of the situation.

‘Precisely! The problem associated with other planets is that I am not able to return to earth with anything. Therefore it is necessary for the two of you to consume the petals on planet Floran first, before I can complete the process of changing the pair of you back to human beings. I am more than capable of taking care of myself, if I travelled there alone, but by taking the pair of you along our lives will be at great risk. That is of course if you are prepared to take a risk of such magnitude.’

Frank and Philip looked at each other, with a large lump seated at the back of their throats. This was a very scary decision for them to make, but what choice did they really have, unless they wished to be monkeys for the rest of their lives?

‘Okay, we’ll do it!’ Frank spoke bravely, not sounding very confident.

‘You boys must understand, most of planet Floran is covered with grass, and the dense vegetation may pose a threat. Just make sure that you stay close to me then everything should be okay. I only hope we don’t have too much difficulty in finding the Frego flower.’

The boys smiled awkwardly, feeling a little comforted by Chimzen’s words.

* * * * *

Everyone looked up in surprise, hearing a sharp frantic tapping noise on the window above Elvis’s tank. Chimzen stood up and walked towards the window with a big smile on his face.

‘That must be Squidget; he sounds rather upset.’ Chimzen opened the latched window, and as he did so, a round ball of fur bounced in through it and collapsed smartly onto the floor. Frank and Philip jumped in fright, quite taken by the strange ball of fur. Chimzen roared with laughter, watching their puzzled reaction.

Lying on his back wearing a small black waistcoat was a small squirrel, a bit shaken up from the fall. Slowly standing on his hind legs, the squirrel dusted his little coat in a huff, looking quite cute with his almost human actions. Frank and Philip were seated in the centre of the round table, curiously peering over the edge. The squirrel sprang into the air and perched himself neatly on the end of the table, shaking his fluffy tail, completely unaware of the boys’ presence. Noticing the two

hairy creatures seated on the table, the poor squirrel leaped into the air in fright, with his hair standing on end like a toilet brush. The frightened squirrel grabbed onto Chimzen's leg, his little body trembling with fear. Chimzen couldn't help but roll his head back and roar with laughter once again.

'Never mind, Squidget, no one is going to hurt you. These are my friends, Philip and Frank.' Chimzen leaned over, reaching for the frightened little creature, and carefully placed him on his shoulder. Once again the little squirrel rearranged his black waistcoat, staring curiously at the two monkeys seated on the table. Chimzen reached into his drawer and produced an acorn which he handed to the fuzzy creature. Squidget grabbed the nut eagerly, and started nibbling it like it was going to be snatched away from him at any moment.

'Tell me Squidget, why do you seem so stressed today, my friend?' Chimzen asked, stroking his furry head. The little squirrel gulped down the remains of the acorn, leaped down onto the floor, and dashed towards the bookshelves. He scuttled to the top, and seated himself on a large floating book.

'Well you see master, I must warn you,' the little squirrel chattered, waving his tiny paws in the air like a general giving frantic instructions during a war. 'I have seen Mathias the treacherous hovering around these parts. I have no idea what he is up to, but I do know that he is planning some sort of an attack.'

Chimzen sat back in his desk chair with his hands tucked behind his head, always showing concern for the general wellbeing of all the little animals inhabiting the woods.

'There is a very simple explanation for that, Squidget,' he answered, tapping his fingers on the chair. He told Frank and Philip's story to the flustered little squirrel, explaining the fact that Mathias would most probably stop at nothing to recapture them. The boys looked a bit worried; the thought of going back to Mathias's den gave them the absolute creeps.

'What if he catches me master?' Squidget asked, waving his paws in the air while his little body shivered in fright.

'Not to worry Squidget, I have formulated a very special ointment to assist all the little animals that inhabit these woods. Would you like to test it for me?'

'Well, what does it do exactly?' the squirrel asked, shyly placing his paws behind his back.

'Come and sit on my lap; let's see if it works,' Chimzen said, patting his knees. Placing his hands carefully into the middle drawer, he produced a medium sized bottle containing thick red ointment. The squirrel crept down from the bookshelf and edged cautiously towards him.

‘Come on, I haven’t got all day now!’ the wizard exclaimed, still grinning from ear to ear.

Squidget timidly jumped up onto his lap, feeling a little uneasy. He knew he could trust Chimzen though, so he sat back in good faith.

Chimzen placed the red ointment on all four of Squidget’s little feet, softly caressing it into the pads. Then he very carefully placed the little squirrel on the floor. Squidget walked across the room on all fours like a five year old trying out roller blades for the first time.

‘Now Squidget, what I want you to do is take a small jump,’ Chimzen instructed, scratching his head. ‘Remember, only a small jump, Squidget.’

Without any further ado the little squirrel jumped. Much to his surprise, the alarmed creature launched straight up and almost slammed into the ceiling. His little heart almost jumped into his throat, as he wasn’t quite expecting such an intense reaction to the red cream. Squidget stretched his legs out as he plunged downwards, as if he was trying to apply brakes. He landed smartly on his hind legs, and bounced on the floor in a series of jolts, until he eventually slowed to a standstill. He sat on the floor looking half dazed; the sudden power in his spring had completely overwhelmed the poor creature.

‘Wow that was amazing! Now you can call me super squirrel!’ he shouted, completely overjoyed. Chimzen sat back in his chair clutching his face, while the rest of his body shook with laughter.

‘Once you have adjusted to the power in your spring, I doubt very much that Mathias is going to come anywhere near you!’ Chimzen cried, now clutching his sides to try and contain the fit of laughter. The boys were also virtually wetting themselves when they saw Squidget launch to the roof. As for the trio, they were hopping up and down on the desk in the corner, chuckling their balls off. Even Elvis was standing on his little platform, gills flapping with deep laughter. I guess you had to see the squirrel in action yourself to appreciate the humour. Calling Squidget, Chimzen opened the tree house door.

‘Come here my furry friend, let’s all watch you fly.’

Squidget dragged himself unsteadily towards the open door, afraid of taking off at any moment.

‘This could be dangerous,’ he stammered, taking a cautious hop out of the door. Squidget was off like a turbo charged spring, bouncing up and down through the trees, shrieking his little lungs out in excitement. The rest of the group watched with big smiles as he disappeared through the trees.

Chimzen slowly closed the door, still grinning from ear to ear, and looking

very pleased with the success of his magic jumping ointment.

* * * * *

‘Oh well, time to consider more serious matters,’ he said, plonking himself back into his chair, taking a deep breath.

‘Firstly, I will have to create some kind of magical protection around my tree house to prevent Mathias from causing any damage while we are away. It seems that he is on the warpath, and I’m certainly not taking any chances.’ Chimzen turned to face his desk and paged carefully through his book of wizardry. The Malco trio suddenly came alive, springing up from where they lay and hovering over their master’s head. Chimzen flipped through the pages in the big black book, squinting his eyes as if in need of a pair of spectacles.

‘Ah, here we go!’ he announced, running his fingers over the relevant lines. He got up from his desk chair and positioned himself next to the round table in the centre of the room.

‘Malco trio, please take your places!’ he said firmly, pointing his potent stick upwards and waving it in a slow circular motion. The trio knew the procedure all too well and shot through the little window Squidget had entered earlier, chuckling as they spun along. The three balls lined up in a triangular formation directly above the little tree house, sensing the power of Chimzen’s staff as they spun into position.

Chimzen waved his staff in wider circles to prepare the Malcos for the protection procedure. Then he chanted words from his magic book:

*‘Das tre bales hev dat krag ad di mes keem,
The three balls have the power as it may seem,
Do tovect ma tre hus tif u daser keem,
To protect my house with a laser beam,
Das teng vi sef, das teng vi rigt,
I swing you left, I swing you right,
lest mas heft hover ke u horce te jite,
Let my great power be a force of light,
De sority vate en seture,
Security safe and secure,
Gast de dief esto sag kuck,
Blast the thief into soft manure.’*

As Chimzen chanted the words of the spell of protection, he continued waving his

powerful staff in a circular motion, and the Malco trio started spinning faster and faster. Soon they were spinning at an incredible speed, while projecting beams of red light at one another. Surrounding the tree house, they slowly moved up and down its full height. Gradually they increased their speed, until eventually what looked like a long tubular triangle was formed, surrounding Chimzen's home. The trio moved away from the tree house once the spell had been completed, and the long red laser triangle still remained perfectly intact. No one would dare come near the deadly security system, unless they had a death wish. Fortunately all of Chimzen's animal friends had been warned about the red triangle shield, so there wouldn't be any instances of cremated birds or squirrels to have to worry about.

Chimzen returned his staff to his side and explained to the boys exactly what he had done. They weren't really amazed or even surprised for that matter; they were becoming quite accustomed to all of these events concerning magic. The Malco balls created several fiery sparks as they zipped through the red laser shield, and flew into the room through the little window, heading straight for the little planets that hovered above the round table. They appeared as though they were steaming from the incredible heat endured outside, and the boys were quite shocked by the trail of smoke that followed in after them.

'Wow! Those balls are really smoking Frank!'

'My goodness, they sure can take the heat!'

'Well done Malcos,' Chimzen said, smiling proudly, 'it seems as though we no longer need to worry about Mathias or any of his destructive schemes; the tree house will be well protected now.' Chimzen looked sternly at the boys, while tapping his staff on the floor.

'This is it then! We had better be on our way!' he announced. 'Are you boys quite sure that you want to do this?'

Philip stared at Frank, feeling a little bit nervous.

'Well we most certainly don't wish to be monkeys for the rest of our lives, so let's go,' Frank replied, looking at Philip for a response. Philip looked down and nodded slowly, only hoping he wouldn't regret his decision later on.

'Okay, it's decided then, let's be off,' Chimzen said, walking over to his desk. 'Let me gather a few things together then we can prepare for the launch.' Chimzen reached into his top drawer and grabbed a little black book along with a few other odds and ends. He asked the boys to stand back to back with him in a triangular formation just below the revolving green planet. The Malcos zipped around the three to gain an exact teleport position.

'Make sure you take us to an open field, Malcos, and not anywhere near a

dangerous forest,' Chimzen addressed the trio, holding the two boys firmly behind him.

'Most certainly master! We will take the utmost care!' Zen exclaimed, spinning towards the round green planet above the table. Zet and Zip formed a straight line behind Zen, who was pressed hard up against the floating green ball. Chimzen raised his staff towards the little planet, and began to chant his magic:

*'Dre jitle sales das kin op!
Three little balls that spin on!
fan dasses go klamet Floran!
Gain access to planet Floran!'*

The Malco trio started to glow fiery hot, until they smouldered into darkened bronze. The dark bronze balls glowed like a fluorescent light, and finally turned to solid gold. The little green planet transformed from a solid ball into a floating green liquid goo. Shortly afterwards the three gold balls merged with the little oozing planet and promptly disappeared. The three were left behind standing for quite some time. Chimzen waited patiently, knowing well that the Malcos had a fair amount of space travelling to do before they would arrive on land.

Finally it happened. Frank and Philip had knots in their stomachs as they watched themselves slowly disappear. Shortly afterwards all three vanished into thin air, and the room was left strangely empty, except for Elvis, of course!

Chapter 9

After some time spent chasing the Malco trio, Mathias realized that he was wasting his time. To catch them would be like catching a bullet fired from a gun. He was absolutely furious, knowing very well that his cousin had just stolen his prize monkeys. He only wished that he had thought twice about trying to catch them, and had rather returned to the cage where the boys were tied up.

‘How dare you do this to me Chimzen, you good for nothing fool,’ he muttered, hovering closer to the tree house with his baggy blue jeans flapping in the breeze. ‘There goes all my hard work and preparations down the drain.’

The wizard held his chin, plotting evil things as he gazed up and down the tall pepper tree abode. ‘That blasted cousin of mine; I will make sure he pays for what he has done! He’s nothing but a common thief!’

Squidget perched near the tree house and watched him approach. The little squirrel sat trembling on a branch and closed his little jacket tightly around himself. A big smile lit Mathias’s face while he absent-mindedly smeared yellow goo onto his jeans. He had just come up with the most incredibly wicked idea. Without hovering for a moment longer, he flew back to his hole, chuckling like a devil.

He feared Chimzen’s awesome power and very seldom ever pursued any of his wicked plans, knowing that he could live to regret it. This time he didn’t care though; he was completely irrational. Chimzen would have to pay for stealing from him. He slapped the pistol down on the table in the entrance hall and rushed down the passage with his lamp. Once he had returned the flying jeans to the room on the left, he checked quickly to see if the boys were actually gone. ‘Damn you Chimzen! You will pay for this!’ he roared, seeing the empty cage. Fumbling in his pocket for a moment, he withdrew his bunch of keys and turned to face the large steel door on his right.

He slotted a large key into the rusty keyhole with trembling hands, and finally jerked it open after applying considerable force. The door creaked ajar like an old

safe, releasing a pungent odour. It was filled with rows of shelves on either side that reached up to the mouldy ceiling. Standing on the shelves was a large display of glass bottles of all different shapes and sizes, each one, no doubt, filled with some kind of disgusting evil. He stepped into the room and walked to the far right hand corner.

‘Where can it be?’ he pondered, running a filthy fingernail across the dusty labels. ‘I’m sure I put it here to keep safe for a rainy day!’ After a short period of muttering, complaining and searching, he stumbled across what he was looking for.

‘Ah, there you are!’ he exclaimed, snatching the dusty bottle and examining it closely to see if he had the correct one. The dusty label read: “Sizing Agent”.

‘Ah ha! This is the one!’ he announced with glee, displaying a mouth of filthy teeth. The bottle contained a murky slimy green liquid, like something taken from the bottom of an old stagnant pond. He locked the large steel door and marched off to the table in the entrance hall.

Taking an empty jar from the table in the corner, he emptied the yellow goo from his pistol.

‘I think I will save this for another day, when I finally get to catch those blasted balls,’ he muttered, placing the jar to one side of the table. The yellow goo together with a simple spell could dissolve the trio into nothing. The only problem was he was finding them impossible to catch.

The evil wizard opened the jar of sizing agent and very carefully filled the pistol with the green slime. Then he took it up the ladder with him and squirted it a few times while carefully adjusting the nozzle to a fine green mist.

‘There we go, my gun’s ready; now all I need is suitable subject matter,’ he said, inspecting the revolving tip with childlike satisfaction. What on earth can this wicked man be up to?

He returned to his table and triumphantly slapped the pistol down. Then he grabbed a medium sized flask complete with lid from the table corner and hastily climbed the exit ladder, almost dropping the flask lid in excitement as he walked out into the open. He scanned the ground carefully while pacing forward and shuffling the leaves from left to right with his smelly shoe, desperately in search of something. After a few minutes he suddenly dropped down on all fours like a father playing horsey-horsey with his small son, and started fumbling through the soil with his hands. At last, he found exactly what he was looking for.

‘I knew that wouldn’t take very long!’ he announced with glee, running his grubby fingers through the sand. ‘In the flask you go, yes, all of you; come along!’

Mathias had just stumbled across an ant nest and was busy scooping thousands

of ordinary little black garden ants into his glass container. Standing up onto his feet he carefully twisted the glass lid back in place with his filthy hand, confining almost an entire ant nest.

‘Now for the final stage of my plan,’ he chuckled, marching back to his underground dungeon.

He sat at his corner worktable with the lamp shining brightly on his left, while he flipped through his large book of dark magic in search of spells of destruction. He started to feel frustrated after some time, unable to find exactly what he was looking for.

‘Aha, here we go!’ he exclaimed, rubbing his hands together with glee. ‘I knew you were here somewhere!’ He remained seated for a while, reciting the spell in preparation for his wicked plan. ‘Okay, I think I’m finally ready,’ he said, scanning across the page one last time.

He rushed off to fetch his flying jeans, reciting the spell under his breath as he went. When he was dressed he grabbed the sealed flask of ants and the pistol filled with green sludge. He quickly glanced over the room one more time, making sure he had everything necessary for his treacherous mission, and disappeared out into the open.

* * * * *

The wizard flew through the air with his jeans flapping wildly in the breeze, and shortly arrived outside the pepper tree abode. Gazing up its length, he noticed the red laser force field surrounding it.

‘Oh, I see my beloved cousin has his tree house protection shield activated. What use is that going to be to him now, I wonder?’ he sniggered, hovering halfway up, laughing and shaking his head at the same time. ‘When I’m finished here he won’t have a home left to protect. At least there’s no one at home now, which means I can continue in peace.’

He hovered slowly to the ground, boasting proudly to himself about what he hoped to achieve like a blind man bragging about flying an aeroplane for the first time.

Standing firmly on the ground, he scattered all the fallen leaves by the large pepper tree to one side with his foot. First removing the lid, he leaned over and emptied the contents of the ant flask onto the cleared area below. Standing about five paces back, he began chanting a string of destructive rhymes. The wicked wizard rattled off his perverse chant in a foreign pagan language which, translated,

read as follows:

*'Though they may only be little black helpers
Transform their pincers into large sharp callipers
Once a tiny worker ant, now a hundred times their size
Becomes a vicious new breed, destruction on the rise
Summoning the forces of darkness into my herbal green slime
Combine your powers with the little black ones, to create a terrible crime.'*

He stood back, holding his pistol with both hands; his face displayed an element of craziness. Without any further hesitation, he fired the pistol in the direction of the little garden ants. The spray shot forward in an even circular jet of green mist, and thoroughly soaked the area where the ants had been released. Mathias took off into the air like a thief dashing from the scene of a crime, and hovered above his wicked experiment in safety. The view from the top was like watching popcorn kernels popping in hot oil, with hundreds of tiny ants exploding into large bodied creatures with pincers the size of sheep shears. The ants had large black abdomens, which shone like rough polished steel. Their eyes appeared glazed, like a robot programmed for destruction, and make no mistake these boys were destructive with a capital "D". The little black ants quickly transformed into large snapping monsters, exploding into an enormous ant stack about twelve feet high. Slowly they dispersed, spreading out over a wide area of land. Leaves, trees, flowers, grass, insects, bugs, snakes – the beastly ants marched forward like an army troop, devouring everything in sight. Hovering at a safe distance, the wizard breathed a sigh of relief as he watched the beasts cause mass destruction. 'I sure am glad to be flying up here where it's safe; I didn't realize that these creatures were quite so destructive,' he thought, watching every single thing in sight being devoured. He soon broke into a cold sweat, having second thoughts about his wicked scheme. He gazed towards the pepper tree supporting Chimzen's house and couldn't help smiling as he watched at least fifteen of the devilish ants hard at work, snapping their way through the large trunk like a high powered chainsaw. Within ten minutes the trunk was reduced to the thickness of a pencil, evenly chewed from top to bottom. He gazed on in anticipation, expecting the house to come crashing down at any moment. Soon, the pencil thin trunk started bending near its base and the entire tree came splintering down into a large pile of sticks, leaves and sawdust.

Mathias gazed up in feeble anticipation, knowing it wouldn't be long to go. You see this was where he made a rather unfortunate mistake. The laser protection surrounding Chimzen's house not only protected it from burglars, but it also held

it perfectly suspended in the air. The wizard knew that Mathias would go straight for the tree trunk, although he had no idea that his wicked cousin would take such extreme measures; a simple axe would have done the job.

Mathias stared up at his cousin's suspended abode in horror.

'Damn you Chimzen! Damn you!' he roared, ripping out tufts of blue hair in frustration.

The ants scattered in all directions, guzzling everything in sight. The woods would soon be levelled, leaving nothing untouched other than sand and rocks. What made the situation far worse was that Mathias had no clue on how to transform the greedy munchers back to ordinary garden ants. His wicked nature only made him capable of clever destruction and completely hopeless when it came to doing anything good.

He hovered over the woods with a look of dismal sorrow displayed on his face. Squidget the squirrel sat on a branch in the distance; his little body quivered as he watched over the destruction. Fortunately he was capable of moving at an incredible speed and bounced off to a place of safety. Mathias never even noticed him; he was far too preoccupied with the dilemma at hand.

'What on earth am I going to do? Soon these wretched chewing beasts will eat me out of house and home.'

* * * * *

The wicked wizard hovered like a rag doll, feeling completely helpless as he watched the mutant ants spread in all directions, rapidly reducing the once plush green woods to a rapidly expanding circle of desolate destruction. The ant beasts were never content; the more they ate the more they wanted. The woods became the petrol like they were a fire, spreading devastation in all directions.

Mathias was far too stubborn to actually admit that Chimzen was the only person who could sort out a mess of this magnitude. And even if he had decided to rely on his cousin for help, it would have been of no use. The good wizard was unfortunately millennia away at that point in time.

Chapter 10

The Malco trio plummeted down through the sky, slowly transforming from solid gold to balls of liquid fire as they entered Floran's atmosphere and gradually cooled down. After a while they were back to their bright shiny silvery selves, heading towards a vast expanse of green. Zen veered slightly to the left and the others followed suit, making sure that he chose a suitable landing area on large open terrain. The trio rocketed forward like a space shuttle approaching earth. After a while, the large green expanse of land came into clear perspective, with large dense forests appearing very dark green in colour as apposed to the lighter green textures of the open fields. Shortly afterwards, the three balls landed on a very large expanse of tall green grass, extending in all directions as far as the eye could see, with absolutely no sign of life in sight.

The Malco balls landed in absolute silence, without making a single squeak. A mission like this was very draining and they needed time to recharge, which they did at an incredible rate. They hovered slightly above the ground, and projected coloured beams towards each other. The colourful triangle was formed and the trio gently lowered themselves to the ground. The projection of radiant light formed a large pyramid to accommodate the wizard and his friends. The teleport pyramid transported the three space travellers to Floran in an instant. The brilliant light soon faded, leaving the small group standing in the large open field. The two boys looked around in amazement; were they really on a foreign planet? It appeared to them more like they were standing in the middle of an endless overgrown sports field, nothing at all unusual.

* * * * *

‘Well my friends, I hope you are ready for a most unusual journey,’ Chimzen said, stretching out his hand to receive the Malco trio. The three balls flew into his hand, rattling with excitement. The wizard beamed at his faithful friends, rolling

them gently in his hand. ‘Well done Malcos! I know I can always depend on your services.’

The group stared out across the grassy plain for a short while, with the boys feeling somewhat restless and unsure. Returning his gaze to the trio, the wizard suddenly shouted, ‘Okay Malcos, I think it’s time to fly!’ and tossed them into the air. The trio spun off, criss-crossing each other like three little birds having a game. In a moment they returned, giggling like schoolchildren out on break. They grew silent, and hovered slightly above the ground in a triangular formation.

Being the leader of the three, Zen positioned himself as the front point of the triangle, and the other two trailed behind as the two back points. Zen fired a thick yellow beam across to Zip and Zet. In response, Zet fired the same type of beam across to Zip. The three balls formed a solid yellow triangular band, which spread out across the inside of the triangle, making a nice solid triangular platform. Chimzen beckoned the boys to step onto the solid yellow platform.

‘What do you mean?’ Frank asked, staring at the triangular object in confusion.

‘Well, you don’t expect us to walk, do you?’ Chimzen asked, laughing at the surprised look on Frank’s face. Philip scratched his head, a bit hesitant to step on. ‘This looks very strange indeed,’ he thought to himself. ‘It’s like a giant hovering surfboard.’

Chimzen stepped on, reluctantly followed by the two. Frank and Philip stepped on nervously, unsure of the platform’s stability. Checking to see if everyone was safely on board, Chimzen yelled out, ‘Let’s go Malcos! Straight ahead!’ The wizard wasn’t all that sure of which direction to take, so straight ahead seemed as good as any. The Malcos hovered forward, gradually increasing their speed. Frank and Philip sat clutching Chimzen’s leg firmly.

‘Wow wee, this is amazing!’ Philip cried. The boys sat looking at each other with big smiles, not quite believing the whole experience. Chimzen glanced back to see how the boys were doing. Seeing them both shaking in their shoes, he tilted his head back and roared with laughter.

‘I guess you boys have never had a ride like this before, hey?’

They both sat slowly shaking their heads, at a complete loss for words. Chimzen was really enjoying their reactions, holding a few more surprises up his sleeves for later. Monitoring the stability of the three passengers, the Malcos accelerated, gradually increasing their flying speed. The boys tightened their grip on Chimzen’s leg, petrified of falling off.

The grass plain stretched on for miles and it would have taken them months to get anywhere if they had gone on foot. Frank and Philip released their grip

on Chimzen's leg, feeling more confident now with this new form of transport. Frank moved closer to the platform edge and gazed over the endless stretch of grass passing beneath. Philip lay on his back, while a strong breeze rushed over his little hairy body as he looked up at the cloudy sky. Chimzen turned his head, and called to the boys, 'Frank and Philip, sit closer, we need to lift off!'

'Lift off! Does this mean we're going to fly?' Philip asked, grabbing onto Chimzen's leg. The noise of the wind rushing past was so loud that Philip's question went completely unheard.

Chimzen needed a good aerial view of the land to give him an idea of their progress. The wizard spread his legs further apart as if he was about to surf an enormous wave.

'Malcos, prepare to lift off!' he bellowed, standing firmly in position.

Gradually the trio reduced their speed and gently lifted into the air. The platform remained perfectly horizontal as they climbed, making a very smooth ride. Frank and Philip could feel their hearts jump into their mouths; the rising sensation felt unusually strange. Frank had been in an aeroplane before, the time he had flown to America for the international high school boxing championships. This felt somehow quite different to a conventional aircraft. Frank had made it as far as the semi finals and thought he had been judged very unfairly, believing that he should have at least made it to the finals. Well at least that's what he tells everyone back home. No one really knows for sure, and if you think you know better, just try telling Frank that he's a sore loser.

Up and up they climbed; Chimzen gazed over the horizon with his left hand in line with his forehead. Eventually the Malcos stopped climbing and continued forward at a fair speed. Chimzen noticed vast clumps of trees and green life scattered in the distance, spread out like an endless Amazon.

'Well that's a relief; it looks like we'll be looking for that precious Frego flower soon.'

Frank and Philip didn't hear a word; they were both lying with their heads hanging over the edge of the platform, staring at the endless stretch of green grass. Chimzen smiled, watching them chat excitedly to each other while pointing their little monkey fingers into the air. Getting the boys' attention, the wizard told them to take a look on his side; it was far more exciting than plain grass. Carefully, the boys crawled across the platform and plonked themselves in front. They sat gazing at the endless rows of trees and the enormous green stretch of land below, amazed by its incredible vastness. Frank and Philip remained at Chimzen's feet, gazing ahead as the board hovered closer and closer.

Chimzen looked ahead, now seeing things in clear perspective. He noticed a particularly large clump of trees growing in a perfect circle, surrounding a large stretch of open grass, unlike the other clumps of trees which had no open land at all. Chimzen ordered the trio to head towards the dense vegetation within the open enclosure. He explained to the boys that the Frego flower was particularly fond of partial light and that they would most likely find dozens of them along the inside of the vegetation ring. The boys nodded, putting their faith in his better judgement. The Malco trio hovered above the large enclosure of trees and vegetation. Chimzen scanned the area below carefully, making sure that it was safe to land. After receiving an okay, the Malcos lowered their precious cargo to the ground.

* * * * *

There was a slight breeze blowing through the trees; other than that, the place was deadly quiet. Frank and Philip gazed up towards the trees, feeling a bit uneasy about the place. The silence was profound with not a sound from a bird or a bee. No ants walking through the grass. No flies buzzing past. No butterflies with colourful wings flapping in the air. The boys stepped off the hovering platform feeling scared, but filled with a sense of relief at having Chimzen by their side. They couldn't see the dense vegetation very clearly from where they stood and they didn't really care to either. This place gave them the absolute creeps.

'Now remember what I've told you before.' Chimzen addressed the boys sternly, waving his index finger. 'Make sure that you never leave my side. If you see something interesting, just ignore it. If you stay with me nothing can go wrong.'

'Yes sir!' they yelled, nodding in agreement. They most certainly wouldn't be taking any chances, that was for sure! The Malco trio disengaged their yellow beams and spun off, hovering above their master.

The group had been walking across the open field for a while, and the Floran sun shone brilliantly across the grass enclosure. Frank ambled along on all fours staring closely at the ground, and noticed the grass growing beneath looked quite unusual. In fact it didn't seem like grass at all! The ground looked as if it was covered with a large velvet sheet, with an almost furry, leaf-like texture. It was very hard to notice at first because of all the leaves and other dead plant foliage lying scattered everywhere. A short distance away, to the right of the boys, a funny looking green spike protruded from the ground.

'Frank, what's that funny green thing over there?' Philip asked, pointing to the funny spike. Being in monkey form, the boys possessed a strong element of

curiosity, so without a second thought, they both scuttled off to investigate. Frank stood next to the strange green spike which seemed to form part of the velvet sheet, and curiously gazed up and down its length. He started shuffling back and forth, lashing out at the spike with his little monkey fists as if it were some kind of a floral punching bag.

‘What is it Frank?’ Philip asked for the second time. Deliberately disobeying Chimzen’s orders, he grabbed the end of its green length firmly with both monkey hands. The boys leapt into the air, startled, as the ground shook beneath them. At first they thought it was an earthquake. Then they saw an enormous sheet of thick velvety leaf rise up and surround them. Chimzen fell backwards, sliding down the enormous leaf, desperately trying to grab onto something. The plant was spread out across the entire opening like an enormous lily pad; now triggered off, it enfolded its unsuspecting victims with a thick layer of velvet leaf. The enormous lily had been triggered like a Venus flytrap, a plant that restricts its prey, sucking the very life from its unsuspecting victim. Soon the thick velvet killer had its enormous circular leaf pointed straight up in the air. It folded inwards, suffocating the three victims with constricting pressure. The poor boys desperately struggled to free themselves, but the harder they fought, the tighter the deadly leaf gripped them. ‘This is the most terrible thing that could possibly happen to us,’ Frank thought to himself, desperately trying to breathe. Using his last breath, Philip cried out to Chimzen for help, and unfortunately there was no reply.

The plant didn’t really have much of a stem, only a very long taproot which allowed it to blend nicely with its environment. Normally it would settle for a large helping of leaves and sticks for dinner, but today it was in for a special treat.

Chimzen called upon the Malco trio before being completely enfolded by a suffocating sheet of leaf.

Taken by complete surprise, the Malcos spun into action and transformed instantly into blazing fireballs. In a desperate attempt to free their master they sliced through the thick leaf like a hot knife through butter. They carefully spun from left to right, checking out the exact location of their master. The trio were in a very dangerous form and they had to be certain that they didn’t cause their master any harm. In seconds, the three balls stood lined up across the length of the leaf-encased body, shining brightly, with thick smoke belching into the air. Like a bullet, they weaved around their master several times, shredding the thick velvet covering. The gigantic leaf seemed to shrink back in pain from the intense heat, a shock wave surging all the way to its root. Chimzen quickly flung the remains of the shredded leaf enfolding him to one side and gasped for air. Without having a

chance to regain his balance properly, he slid down the gigantic leaf and landed on the ground with a thump.

The trio wasted no time waiting for their master to give further orders; Frank and Philip were close to suffocation by now, possibly even dead. The Malcos desperately scanned the surface of the gigantic leaf in search of the boys. There were many areas where they may have been potentially trapped. Unfortunately there was just no time to check each one, and there was also the risk of accidentally hurting one of them as well. The problem was that the poor creatures were just too small to spot; a human being would have been a lot more visible, enfolded in the giant leaf. Zen grew frustrated and desperate, not knowing what to do; the Malcos never let their master down.

‘I have an idea!’ Zip squeaked loudly, spinning to the front next to Zen.

‘Well, what is it?’ Zen asked, sounding desperate.

‘We need to burn the base area and destroy the plant altogether!’ Zip replied confidently.

‘That’s an excellent idea Zip, let’s do it!’

In an instant, the three balls spun to the base of the gigantic killer lily, ablaze like fiery coals. The gigantic lily stood upright displaying its enormous base section clearly, which was easily the same width as Chimzen’s round table. No problem for the Malco trio, only they were running short of time. The three balls quickly bounced into triangular position, spread out across the width of the plant base. In a second or so they projected a red laser beam towards each other, forming a deadly cutting machine. Edging forward towards the base of the plant, they began slicing their way through like a potent high-tech woodcutting machine. The three balls sliced through the base with great ease, causing the smouldering sap to spray in all directions. The plant responded to the deadly attack and immediately opened its enormous velvet trap. Soon it lay spread out over the huge expanse like an enormous open parachute of thick shrivelled velvet, with its base completely severed from the root.

Chimzen watched from a distance, observing the trio make short work of the killer plant. Although the plant’s destruction hadn’t taken very long, he was deeply concerned about the boys as they had been trapped for quite some time already. He ran towards the centre of the enormous leaf, searching desperately for Frank and Philip.

* * * * *

After searching through the dead foliage for a short while, he stumbled across both of them lying very close to each other, suffocated by the gigantic leaf. Chimzen looked desperately worried. The Malcos hovered next to him, also very distressed. They only hoped that they had saved the boys in time. Chimzen grabbed Frank's limp body and quickly placed him next to Philip.

'Come here Zen and Zip!' he called out, not bothering to check the two for any vital signs. 'We need to give them the breath of life, trio.'

The Malcos were the most extraordinary magical balls, capable of performing many useful tasks. Zen and Zip spun into action, hovering over the boys' mouths. Chimzen hurriedly knelt behind them, holding their mouths open by pressing their cheeks inwards on either side with each hand. Without another word spoken, the Malcos projected a very strong blast of seemingly hazy blue air into their mouths. At first they lay dead still, not showing any vital signs. Then it appeared as though their little chests were moving, as their little lungs responded to the magical blast of oxygen. Frank coughed and spluttered, then opened his eyes, looking a bit dazed. Shortly afterwards Philip also responded to the Malco therapy, with his little feet kicking up into the air as his body welcomed the oxygen. Chimzen released his hands from their mouths and stood to his feet. His face lit up with a smile as he breathed a big sigh of relief. The boys lay dead still, taking in slow deep breaths for a while. Frank sat up first, looking very confused, forgetting what had happened for a moment.

'Oh no! I'm so terribly sorry Chimzen!' Frank cried, realizing that they had deliberately disobeyed his orders. Philip sat up in a daze, and apologized to the wizard sheepishly.

'Well well, there's nothing more to be said then, is there?' Chimzen addressed them sternly, scratching his beard with one eyebrow pointing up. 'I take it you boys have learnt a very valuable lesson today?' Frank and Philip nodded mournfully with their heads drooped over in sorrow.

'Not to worry boys, this episode was also partly my fault. I should never have trusted this strange looking enclosure. It was a bit foolish of me to land here in the first place.' Holding the top of his staff with both hands he eyed the large open field. He looked strangely worried and it upset the boys to see him so unsettled. He had no fear when it came to his own life; his only concern was for the safety of the boys, and he was taking the responsibility very seriously.

'Remember what I said to you before, "Stay very close to me at all times, and if you see something interesting, just ignore it." Is that clear?'

The boys nodded vigorously, clutching at the wizard's robe nervously as they

continued onwards.

In a short while they arrived at the edge of the circular enclosure.

* * * * *

‘Now this is a place of great danger and we need to exercise the utmost caution around these parts,’ Chimzen said, on guard for any suspicious moving creatures. ‘Hopefully, we will find what we are looking for near the edge of the inner circle. The further we are from dense vegetation, the better.’

The three stood gazing into the unusual expanse of plants and trees, while the trio hovered above them in silence. It must have been late afternoon already, with the sun nowhere in sight, setting below the horizon and hidden behind a long stretch of cloud. The depths of the circular expanse of growth surrounding them lay thick and gloomy, allowing very little light to pass through. Many of the nearby trees appeared quite normal, just like the ones back home. Others were completely different though, with unusual coloured bark and leaves. Some of the tree trunks were dark velvety blue in colour, with matching shiny dark blue leaves. Others were a dull yellow colour, yet their leaves were green. Other trees appeared quite normal, with dark brown bark, stretching high into the sky, yet at the top the leaves were bright shimmering pink. The variation of trees on planet Floran was endless, an array of thousands of different coloured trunks and leaves.

Many vines and creepers had attached themselves to the trees, surrounding them like twisted mountain bike tyres. Most of them were a normal green colour, except for the odd ones in between, which resembled light blue and orange swimming pool noodles.

Thousands of various plants and shrubs inhabited the ground surface, with many seemingly common to us here on earth, yet most were totally foreign and unusual. The strange thing about many of these plants was that they didn’t require much sunlight and seemed to flourish quite well in amongst the trees. Some of the plants only consisted of one enormous flower, horizontally spread out over the ground surface like the giant lily, connected directly to a large taproot system. These flowers reached a span of about eight feet in diameter, with a magnificent array of large beautifully coloured petals sprouting from the side. The centres of these enormous flowers were packed with large seeds, and each flower displayed a unique hue of colourful brightness all of its own. The flower could be closely compared to a sunflower, only far more magnificent than anything seen on earth.

Another specimen showing its colourful face resembled a rose bush, only far

more magnificent. Most of these rose type bushes had long golden-brown stalks, the tallest ones extending about seven feet high, without a single thorn. The Floran rose bush flowers were absolutely enormous, boasting a variety of rather unusual colours. Bright blue and orange ones were quite commonly seen, as well as an assortment of unusual greens and indigos all blending into one. Many were ordinary yellow, except for a bright blend of orange and red spots scattered in between their petals, which looked as if they had just been painted on by hand. All of these roses possessed soft petals, sprouting beneath the main flower, which made it appear -stunning, but strangely different from the ones back home.

Several orange leafy plants hung from the trees, shaped like paper Chinese lanterns. These leafy lanterns used the tree as a life support system, sucking the sap from its bark like a parasite.

One particular plant, not very commonly seen, looked something like the end of a large cactus embedded in the ground. The strange plant was split into four sections, each one all green and prickly. The four sections pointed away from each other, lying virtually flat on the ground. The unusual plant appeared as though it had a big mouth with a large gullet opening in its centre. The slit cactus would lie open, waiting and keeping very still. Once a leaf or a twig had fallen into the spiky plant's gullet, it would croak like a frog and snap its four spiky sections closed, resuming a cactus pose for a while. It was busy digesting the eagerly awaited food at this stage of the food catching game.

The boys stood staring into the large expanse of forest, amazed at the incredible variety of colourful plants and trees. As beautiful as it was, they still felt strangely uncomfortable about that foreign place.

'Its beauty has fooled many a space traveller seeking to return home with a token of its fine treasure. These beautiful plants can only compare to a fine woman luring a man into captivity with her sweet perfume and dazzling colourful evening wear. Although they may seem radiant, colourful and harmless, don't trust them. This forest will most certainly be the death of you, if you place your trust in its beauty, even for a moment,' Chimzen recited, sounding very mysterious as he gazed into the trees with his hands resting on their monkey shoulders. Frank and Philip had a very good idea what he was talking about, having had first-hand experience earlier on. They still found it hard to believe that any of these lovely flowers could cause them any harm. Nonetheless, they weren't taking any chances and stuck close to the wizard's side.

They walked slowly around the circular enclosure, searching the ground carefully for the magical flower. After a while Chimzen stopped dead in his tracks

and turned to face the boys. Frank and Philip didn't see him stop and came crashing to a standstill, walking straight into the back of his legs. When they said they were going to stay close, they really meant it. He turned to face them, looking solemn; then he addressed them in a sympathetic tone.

'Unfortunately, there is something I forgot to tell the pair of you.'

They gazed at him with worried faces.

'What is it?' they asked in succession.

Chimzen stood strangely quiet, with the staff in the palm of his hand pressed firmly to the ground, staring at the two expectant faces.

'Well you see, unfortunately the Frego flower only blooms at midnight, for about a minute, which means we are going to have to stay here until long after dark. Hopefully we will find one without too much difficulty; as I've said before, they are very scarce.'

The boys stood staring up at the wizard in disbelief, their little hearts sinking. They absolutely dreaded the thought of being in this dangerous place late at night.

'Don't worry, my friends, you will be safe with me,' he said, smiling and patting them on their little heads. The boys looked up, and tried to force a smile in return.

'Now when we eventually find the Frego flower it will be closed, appearing quite different to the flower I described to you earlier. The underside of the flower is black in colour, not silver like the surface. So when you are hunting for the magic flower, look out for the long black petals folding inwards. It is similar to the giant lily, with respect to each flower having its own root, except it is only about the size of my fist. Most importantly, when you find a Frego flower never take your eyes off it! It has the ability to magically disappear, even if you look the other way for a second! This is why there would be no point sending the Malcos in search for one, because as soon as we arrived on the scene, the flower would have completely vanished. We need to hurry now; it will be far easier to spot it while there is still some daylight.'

The three walked on cautiously side by side with their eyes peeled to the ground, carefully scanning the inner perimeter of the enormous enclosure. The Malco trio hovered above the group like three armed bodyguards, looking out for any danger lurking between the trees.

Time passed; the group had been searching for a couple of hours and the sun was rapidly disappearing behind the horizon. The trio spun ahead, activating themselves into three bright balls of light to make the path clear for the three travellers.

Chimzen walked on patiently, virtually right on the edge of the large expanse of trees and green life, with his eyes peeled to the ground. The boys were getting

tired and bored with the search, and were beginning to think it was a hopeless cause.

* * * * *

The forest slowly grew dark, leaving the boys with a creepy feeling of uncertainty. The sun had disappeared, leaving behind a bright starry sky. The stars shone magnificently, and appeared at least three times the size of the ones seen here on earth. Floran's moon also seemed larger than ours and it shone with an unusual pale blue colour. The boys stared upwards in awe of the magnificent sky, trying to grasp its incredible beauty with their mouths hung open in wonder. Chimzen watched their expressions and couldn't help smiling. Every few seconds a shooting star would fly past, lighting up the sky like a small fireworks display. Floran's night sky was really something quite spectacular to see. Well, at least Frank and Philip thought so.

The circular enclosure was well lit with the moon's bright reflection, and the boys felt a lot more comfortable walking in the dark than they thought they would. Chimzen continued searching, with his green robe reflecting the moonlight, and the boys felt comforted by his bold presence.

Suddenly, a leafy green ball sprang out from amongst the plants and leaves. It looked something like an oversized Brussels sprout with thick folds of crinkly dark green leaves encasing its body. It was about the size of an ordinary tennis ball, and it walked on three springy legs which resembled dark green spinach leaves. Chimzen lowered his arms, and forced the two curious monkeys back two paces with him.

'Don't trust anything in this place, you just never know what may happen next,' he whispered, sounding like a soldier warning his platoon of a possible ambush lying ahead. The boys had seen lots of war movies before and Chimzen's response to the leafy ball sounded so weird. The Malcos homed in on the leafy ball, ready to defend the three. Shortly afterwards another one appeared, strutting nonchalantly across the grass, until it eventually caught up with the one in front. Soon four of these leafy creatures marched alongside the small group in single file, heading across the open enclosure like a group of soldiers marching to battle. All of a sudden they hopped sideways, facing the three, and leaped towards them, causing the boys to fall back in fright. As the leafy balls launched forward, they opened from the centre, displaying large cabbage-like mouths filled with rows of jagged twiggy brown teeth. They screeched loudly, sounding something like you

would expect a prehistoric dinosaur to sound. The Malco trio spun into action, blasting the green balls from behind with slashing red laser beams. Zen blasted two green monsters in succession with incredible speed and accuracy. The four leafy creatures exploded into several pieces of scorched cabbage leaves, and fluttered to the ground like an exploded feather pillow. Frank and Philip looked up in horror, staring at the scattered remains. Chimzen addressed the boys like an angry school teacher, shaking his index finger up and down in rage.

‘You see what I mean? This place is incredibly dangerous, you can’t trust anything!’

The boys sat on the ground staring at each other with faces as white as a sheet.

‘What did we do?’ Philip wondered.

‘I dunno, but he looks kinda cross. I think he’s a bit stressed out or something,’ Frank replied, just as confused as his friend. Chimzen wasn’t really mad at them; he was just a bit paranoid when it came to their wellbeing. Not to mention how upset the leafy balls had made the poor man feel.

‘What’s that?’ Chimzen gasped, focusing his attention back to the forest.

A loud screeching sound could be heard coming from their far left, similar to the sound made by the four leafy balls. An enormous ball appeared at the edge of the enclosure, probably about five feet in width.

‘It looks like we have a very unhappy mother,’ Chimzen announced, stepping back cautiously, amazed by its incredible size. The gigantic mother opened her shark teeth trap and let out a loud distressed screech. Frank and Philip ran in the opposite direction, not willing to take any more chances. The Malcos launched towards her, transforming from silver to glowing red fire balls, heading straight for the kill. Into her mouth they flew, bouncing viciously between her jagged teeth, roasting the leafy beast from the inside, microwave oven style.

The gigantic Brussels sprout launched forward unexpectedly, heading straight towards Chimzen. The poor wizard was caught off guard and fell over backwards. Sensing the situation at hand, the Malcos frantically shredded the giant ball. He had no time to escape the fast approaching mother, even though he tried his best to squirm away. With her giant mouth gaping, she came crashing down on top of him. Her leafy sides split open under the pressure, and she exploded over him like an oversized tossed green salad. All that remained was a huge pile of scorched sticky cabbage leaves and thousands of jagged teeth.

The wizard sat up, gasping for air and shovelling the sticky green mess to one side. He looked half dazed, with bits of green leaf stuck to his face and slimy jagged teeth twisted into his beard.

‘Blast that giant ball of leaves,’ he muttered, wiping the cabbage off his face. He slowly stood to his feet, dusting the slimy mess off his robe. The Malcos hovered above him, trying their best not to giggle over the incident.

Chimzen wasn’t upset for long and thanked the trio for saving him.

‘What would I do without you guys?’ he said, smiling up at them with pieces of leaf still stuck to his head. The three balls bounced up and down in the air chuckling; they were always happy to please their master.

Chimzen called to the boys, reassuring them that the coast was clear. They didn’t see much humour in the incident, but they were very relieved to see the good wizard still alive.

‘Well then, we had better continue with the search before we run out of time. I told you boys that you would be safe if you stuck by my side, and that there’s really no need to worry at all.’ He patted them on the head in an effort to lift their spirits. They both nodded in response, unsatisfied with his confident attitude, yet feeling a lot safer with the Malco trio close by.

* * * * *

About two hours had passed and there was still no sign of the Frego flower. The boys kept looking into the forest in fear of some plant critter leaping out but fortunately for them, all remained quiet.

Chimzen stopped dead in his tracks and looked up into a tree alongside the enclosure’s edge. The boys were walking in a daze, with both of them feeling tired and hungry. They continued walking, not noticing that Chimzen stood stationary.

‘Hey! Where are you two going?’ he yelled, smiling as he watched them walk on like a pair of sleepwalkers. They turned their heads in surprise and hastily bounded to his side.

‘Sorry sir, we didn’t realize that you had stopped,’ Frank said, wondering what he was up to.

‘I take it you boys must be quite hungry by now?’ Chimzen asked, smiling down at the two sad faces. They both nodded together, not really understanding his point. The wizard pointed at a tree close to the edge of the enclosure.

‘You see that tree over there?’

They squinted in the dark trying to get a clear view. It looked exactly like a banana tree with long green leaves. It was nothing unusual except for one very strange thing; the tree didn’t have any bananas growing on it. It did have fruit though, and they were shaped like bananas, only they had a prickly pineapple

covering.

‘Yes! What on earth is that?’ Philip exclaimed.

‘That my friend is a pinana tree!’ Chimzen announced, chuckling at Philip’s puzzled expression.

‘A pinana tree?’

‘Yes! It is a cross between a pineapple and a banana, and the fruit is absolutely marvellous. Why don’t you boys go and pick a bunch, I’m absolutely starving.’

Without giving it a second thought, the boys climbed up the tree like a pair of real monkeys, and carefully plucked a bunch of prickly pinanas. The Malcos spun after them to light the way and make sure that they returned safely.

The three sat together, munching on the soft juicy pinanas. Fortunately, Chimzen had a small pocket knife with him, or otherwise it would have been rather difficult to split the pinana by hand. Once it had been stripped of its hard pineapple covering, it resembled an ordinary banana. Yet when you took a bite it gushed with sweet pineapple juice, and mashed between your teeth like a sweet ripened banana. Though the combination may sound bizarre, the three chomped at the pinanas like they were choice food from heaven. They lay on their backs, with bloated stomachs pointed up to the stars. They were feeling a lot better after such a delicious meal.

* * * * *

Chimzen stood to his feet and dusted the grass off his robe.

‘We had better get moving boys; our time is running short,’ he said, rubbing his swollen belly.

Shortly, the party of three was back on track, scanning the open stretch of grass for the precious flower. Frank and Philip felt fresh and renewed, eager to continue with the search.

‘What’s that?’ Philip cried, pointing to something near a large overhanging leaf, protruding from the grass.

‘If you think you have seen something don’t take your eyes off it, Philip, not even for a second!’ Chimzen commanded excitedly, following Philip’s pointed monkey finger carefully with his eyes. Philip bounded off to the large overhanging leaf and plonked himself down next to what he thought was the magical flower.

‘I’ve found it! I’ve found it!’ he cried, his eyes locked firmly in place.

‘My goodness, you have indeed!’ Chimzen exclaimed, sitting next to Philip on the grass. Frank’s heart leapt with excitement after hearing the wizard’s confirmation. He bounded across the turf and joined the other two, eager to take a

peep at the strange flower.

The three sat with eyes glued to the magical Frego flower. The outer surface of the petals was black just like Chimzen had said; other than that, it looked quite ordinary, and the boys weren't feeling confident that it was the answer to their problems.

Frank couldn't understand how Philip could have seen it because it blended so well with the dark surroundings. The trio hovered above the small group, nicely lighting the surrounding area.

'What time is it here on planet Floran, Zen?' Chimzen asked, gazing up at the shining ball.

'It is exactly half past ten master,' he replied in his usual squeaky voice, sounding very much like a talking alarm clock. The trio kept perfect time, able to instantly adjust their internal clocks to all the various time zones on different planets.

'That's good, not very long till midnight.'

Frank and Philip started to feel the excitement well up inside. At last they would be human beings again! At last they would be heading back home!

The minutes passed very slowly; it must have been the longest hour and a half in their lives. Chimzen sat patiently, not at all concerned with the time. Patience was something he had learnt well over his long trying life. Philip gazed at the Frego flower hardly even blinking, never mind looking away; he wasn't going to take any chances at that stage of the game.

Finally midnight was closing in.

'It's two minutes to twelve master!' Zen squeaked, spinning over Philip for a closer look.

'Now when the flower opens out, I want the two of you to each carefully pluck a petal from it and place it in your mouth. I must warn you though, the petal is going to taste terrible, and you only have a minute to pluck it, chew it and swallow it.'

The boys nodded firmly, eager for the flower to spread itself.

'Look it's moving!' Philip cried, poking the twitching flower with his little hairy finger. The boys shuffled forward to take a closer look. The time reached twelve o'clock, and in an instant, the black ball of petals sprang open into a splendid array of silver beauty. They gazed at the shimmering flower, mesmerized by its magical silver petals, and the bulging golden centre that glowed brightly in the moonlight.

'Come on boys, hurry! There isn't much time!' Chimzen cried, giving Frank a shove. The boys reached forward with trembling monkey hands. They each plucked a petal from the awesome flower and forced it into their hairy mouths. They began

chewing vigorously, breaking down the magical ingredient. Their faces turned to a look of absolute disgust as they swallowed a piece of the silver leaf. For a moment Frank thought Chimzen was trying to poison them; the petal was absolutely horrid. Nonetheless, the leaves were chewed and swallowed within the allocated minute, and the boys sat clutching at their throats, desperately trying to suck down the horrible tasting petal saliva from their mouths.

‘Not to worry boys, you did it. This will help to remove the bad taste in your mouths,’ Chimzen said, handing each of them a small piece of left over pinana. They reached forward and snatched the heaven-sent fruit from him, and hurriedly shoved the sweet pieces into their mouths. Their pale scrunched up faces immediately transformed into big smiles of relief as they swallowed them down.

‘So I guess the two of you would like to be people again?’ Chimzen asked, scratching his hairy chin, trying to look as serious as possible.

‘Yes sir, most definitely sir!’ the boys chirped, grinning from ear to ear.

‘Maybe I should just leave you as a pair of monkeys. After all, it’s not really all that bad, now is it? Think of it, you guys can swing in trees all day and live on juicy bananas and fresh nuts. Not to mention the most wonderful thing of all, you would never have to go back to boring school ever again.’ He covered his mouth neatly to disguise an exploding smile. Frank and Philip gave him a pale-faced, solemn blank stare, not believing what they had just heard.

‘I’m joking! Of course I’m going to change you back, you silly fools!’ he roared, laughing as he got to his feet, giving them each a good solid pat on the back. The boys stood up, breathing a big sigh of relief. The wizard really had them worried there for a moment.

Chimzen groped inside his pocket for a few seconds, in search of his little black book.

‘Ah, there you are!’ he said, retrieving it from the corner of his pocket. He held it up to his nose, and searched carefully through the pages. The Malcos hovered directly above him, lighting up the little pages to help him see the fine print clearly.

‘I think it’s at the back here somewhere,’ he muttered, fluttering speedily through the little book.

‘Aha! Here we go: “Humans to Animals”, no, not this one, maybe a bit further on. Here we go: “Animals to Humans”. Yes, that’s the one!’

‘Are you monkeys ready to be boys again?’ he asked, smiling at the two anxiously waiting creatures with his right eyebrow pointed up.

‘We most definitely are!’ they shouted, bouncing up and down in excitement. Chimzen placed the boys next to each other and stepped back about three paces,

roughly the length of his staff.

Looking carefully into his little black book, he began chanting in a foreign language – which read in English as follows:

*'Though you appear as monkeys, rather hairy it may seem,
Your animal appearance, is only a wicked scheme,
Magic Frego flower, shimmering silver one,
Surge through their veins, to make this spell undone,
Oh talking monkeys, with little given choice,
Be now restored to cheerful schoolboys.'*

The wizard chanted the foreign rhyme, waving his staff over their heads. Frank and Philip stood riveted in position, unable to move a single muscle as a surge of energy rushed through their hairy bodies. Their blood felt like it was starting to boil as the magic petal sap reacted with their muscle tissue, and their heads felt like they were about to explode under the pressure of the incredible transformation. Their poor little bodies rushed with an electrical surge, while thick clumps of monkey hair flew in all directions. Then they both started shaking violently, falling to the ground as if they were having a fit, with spit spraying wildly from their convulsing mouths. They thought something was going seriously wrong as they glanced over their patchy, deformed-looking bodies. The transformation process was so disturbing and unbearably painful that they eventually passed out from the shock.

Chimzen stood at Frank's side, and tapped him gently on his cheek. Frank woke up with a jerk, coughing and spluttering, and feeling very disorientated. After taking a few deep breaths, he wiped the drool off his mouth and immediately looked down at his arms and legs.

'I'm back! I'm back!' he yelled, hardly believing his eyes as he touched his human body from top to bottom. Shortly afterwards, Philip also stirred from his unconscious spell, and could hardly believe what he saw. Thrilled to be human again, he hastily wiped the drool off his mouth, smearing globules of spit into his mop of scruffy red hair. He leaped excitedly to his feet.

The boys spent a while touching and rubbing themselves, which would have looked quite strange to someone standing on the outskirts completely unaware of the bizarre situation. It felt very strange to them having their old bodies back because they had grown quite accustomed to the feel of being monkeys by then. Fortunately they were back in their school clothes and weren't left standing naked. Chimzen watched them jump up and down with joy, and felt very relieved that they had been successfully restored.

‘I’m terribly sorry that the two of you had to suffer so much during the transformation process. Unfortunately it is far more traumatic to restore a lesser being to a greater being. Humans are just far more complex creatures. I didn’t tell you boys about the trauma involved because I felt you didn’t need the unnecessary stress of knowing what was to come.’

‘Not to worry Chimzen, at least it’s over. Thank you very much for helping us,’ Frank said, beaming with appreciation.

‘Not a problem young man; at least I finally got to see what the pair of you look like.’ He held his head back and laughed out loud. ‘Philip, I noticed a few freckles when you were a monkey, but now you have an epidemic of them. Are you sure that you don’t have chickenpox by any chance?’

‘Ha ha!’ Philip chirped in a sarcastic tone, not sure whether to laugh or be angry about the witty comment. To make matters worse, Frank burst out laughing as well, as if poor Philip didn’t have a low enough self-esteem as it was. Philip scowled at Frank, yanking off his filthy yellow knotted tie and shoving it forcefully into his pocket.

‘Never mind my boy, everyone has self-conscious issues,’ Chimzen said, placing his hand gently on the boy’s shoulder. ‘I must apologize. My intention was to amuse and not to offend. I do forget sometimes what it’s like to be young and sensitive though.’

‘It’s okay sir, at least I am a freckle faced boy; that’s a lot better than being a hairy monkey,’ Philip said, trying his best not to show the obvious hurt.

‘You’re right about that, boy; imagine eating bananas your whole life through!’

‘Yuck!’

* * * * *

Frank and Philip’s hearts bubbled with joy, both very relieved to be returning home soon. Most importantly, they would be returning home as people.

‘Okay Malcos, let’s be off!’ Chimzen shouted, sounding like a pirate returning home with a ship full of booty. The three walked further out into the opening and stood back to back in teleport position, eager to depart from Floran and all its dangers.

The Malco trio spun around the three excitedly, eager to take them back home to safety. After coordinating their exact positions, Chimzen produced a small blue ball from his pocket. Muttering something under his breath, he flicked it into the air. The little representation of planet earth hovered slightly above them. The wizard

waved his staff at the ball, chanting a few lines out loud:

*'Dre jitle sales op kanijal firth!
Three little balls of magical birth!
Kestore es trow op slanep aarde!
Restore us now to planet earth!'*

Following the same procedure that the trio had used to gain access to planet Floran, they lined themselves up next to the small blue planet and disappeared shortly afterwards.

Chapter 11

In a short while the Malco trio returned to Chimzen's little tree house in the woods. Quite strangely, it was still daytime on earth. Time had passed very slowly while the trio were away. They appeared outside the little green planet all neatly lined up, shining gold in colour. Gradually they changed from gold to bronze and finally glowed brightly red. Once they had cooled down, restored to their usual silvery selves, they spun off into position next to the round table and formed a pyramid of light, the final stage of the teleport process. The trio waited in suspense for the three to reappear. No such luck! There was no sign of anyone. About ten minutes had passed and Zen was getting progressively more and more anxious.

'It looks like something has happened to them,' Zen squeaked despairingly, 'they are no longer in our teleport range.'

'Fortunately there is still a gateway open to Floran, so we can return there right away and find out where they've got to,' Zip squeaked, trying her best to sound hopeful.

Elvis leapt out of the water and landed on his little platform. He seemed rather agitated about something as he hopped up and down on his tail fin.

'Where's Master Chimzen?' he bellowed in his usual deep voice, scanning the room with his beady little eyes.

The balls spun anxiously above Elvis and explained to the little fish that the teleport procedure had failed.

'That's terrible! We so desperately need him here; the woods are a mess!' Elvis exclaimed, his little voice trembling with fear.

'Why, what's wrong?' Zet asked.

'Well, Squidget came in here about an hour ago desperately searching for Chimzen. I was fast asleep at the time and woke up startled by a sharp tapping at the side of my tank. I dashed out to the surface to see what all the fuss was about, only to find a very excited squirrel jumping up and down in front of my tank. Poor Squidget, he looked an absolute wreck. I tried my best to calm him...'

‘We don’t have much time Elvis,’ Zip interrupted, bouncing up and down in frustration, ‘could you please get to the point?’

Elvis cleared his throat deeply and shook his little head in an effort to speed up his story. The poor little fish had very little understanding of the concept of time in his lazy world.

‘Basically what I am trying to say is: Mathias has created hundreds of enormous killer ants and they are busy destroying everything in sight as we speak, and as far as I know, the wizard’s tree has also been chewed to pieces!’ he blurted all in one breath, with his little gills flapping wildly for fresh air.

The three balls disappeared out through the window at the speed of lightning, leaving the flustered goldfish behind to regain his composure.

They gazed over the enormous expanse of barren land in absolute horror, with the sight of countless trees shredded into fine sawdust. The devastation which lay ahead stretched out as far as the balls could see. The little beasts had eaten everything in sight, except for a few shredded branches and leaves. The area had been so neatly cleared that it appeared as though a construction group were in the process of erecting an enormous block of flats. Chimzen’s tree house floated high in the air, surrounded by absolutely nothing other than a large enclosure of fertile soil. The trio looked over the woods in absolute dismay, not quite believing the magnitude of Mathias’s wickedness.

‘We desperately need to get back to our master; he could be in terrible danger!’ Zet exclaimed, spinning frantically around the others.

‘But we can’t leave these beasts to destroy everything in sight!’ Zen exclaimed, torn between two worlds. ‘When we return from Floran the woods may possibly be completely destroyed by then.’

‘Our master is very powerful and perfectly capable of taking care of himself,’ Zip rattled assertively. ‘I think he would want us to save the woods. We really don’t have a choice, Zen!’

The other Malcos agreed that Zip was making perfect sense, and they had to do something before it was too late.

* * * * *

Without further hesitation, they launched forward towards the beastly ants. They were running short of time and blasted ahead like solitary killing machines. The ants chomped at the trees with unsatisfied greed, snipping them into pieces with persistent chainsaw pincers. Absolutely nothing could stop them; they were

programmed for destruction, destroying and gobbling every bit of green in sight. Where would they go next, after cancelling every single tree in the woods? That was a very scary thought.

The three balls swooped upon them in rage, reaching the end of the sandy enclosure in seconds. Large ant abdomens burst open into flames, and black sticky juice sprayed in all directions. The Malcos hovered directly above the deadly giant ant army, firing lethal red laser beams in all directions.

The ants continued blindly devouring trees, with absolutely no response to the deadly onslaught. Legs, heads and bodies went flying in every direction, as hundreds of mutilated black beasts reached their end. The ants were driven by black magic, which made destroying them a very time-consuming process. They proceeded without fear or pain. If a head were blasted off, the remainder of the body would continue forward, attacking a tree in vain.

Zen stopped firing at the beasts, and transformed himself into a blazing ball of fire. Spinning down towards the enemy, he sliced through one of the creatures from the front to the back, splitting it in half. The two smouldering halves marched forward totally independent of each other, with black molten goo oozing from the centre. Zen surged forward like a miniature sun, roasting dozens of determined ant fiends into separate halves. The divided tree munchers marched forward on three legs, groping hopelessly at branches and leaves with their one remaining pincer.

Zet and Zip continued firing laser beams in all directions, decapitating large ants by the hundreds. Thousands of legs were severed from mutilated bodies, and wriggled about the soil, with full intent of causing more destruction.

After quite some time, thousands of fried body parts lay scattered in all directions in large dissected heaps. Heads, abdomens and legs squirmed about the grass, eager to unite and continue with their business. Every single gigantic ant had been blasted into pieces, bringing an abrupt halt to any further destruction of the woods.

The trio bounced off each other for a job well done. Chimzen could magically remove the squirming remains when he returned. If only he had been there in the first place, the ant problem would have been resolved in seconds.

Anyway, the trio had certainly put an end to the destruction, even though it was a bit messy. Sadly, about a third of the woods had been reduced to sawdust: Chimzen would certainly be very upset when he returned.

The Malcos spun off back to the tree house, desperate to return to their master.

‘Look over there Zen!’ Zip squeaked out loudly, spinning in the direction of Mathias’s underground home. The other two balls followed Zip. Mathias sat on the

edge of an enormous trench with his feet dangling over the edge, gazing dismally into his wrecked abode. He had used long lengths of tree trunk as rafters to form a roof for his underground shelter. Unfortunately for the wicked wizard, his scheme had backfired. His wooden roof had been completely devoured by the beastly ants, together with all the twigs and leaves he had used to disguise it. His precious home had been reduced to a gigantic sandpit; and the better part of the surrounding area as well. I guess this brings us back to the good old saying: “What goes around, comes around”.

Mathias looked up at the trio momentarily and gave them a blank stare. He returned his gaze to his destroyed shelter without even moving or saying a word. Completely aware of what the trio had just accomplished, he showed no sign of gratitude. Instead, he resented them all the more. Ultimately he blamed Chimzen for the damage to his home and would see to it that his cousin suffered the consequences thereof. After all, if Chimzen hadn’t stayed in the woods, he wouldn’t have had to set the ants on his tree house in the first place, hence his underground home would have never been destroyed. It was entirely Chimzen’s fault, and it was no use telling Mathias otherwise. He was a bitter man with a heart of stone, and he needed to be taught a lesson for his wicked behaviour.

The Malco trio returned to the tree house, eager to get back to planet Floran and find their master. They spun through the little window in the tree house, and quickly formed a line next to the little green planet. Going through the planet teleport procedure, the three balls promptly disappeared.

Chapter 12

The three stood back to back, eagerly waiting to return home. Frank and Philip absolutely glowed with excitement at the thought of seeing their families and schoolfriends again.

‘Mission successful!’ Chimzen shouted with joy, patting the two boys on their arms. The wizard was very pleased to have the boys restored to people once again and hoped that he would never have to return to Floran ever again. The three waited anxiously. A few minutes had passed which seemed like an eternity.

The trees and plants of the forest fluttered their leaves in the dark, seemingly unsettled. Long thick creepers slid around tree trunks like constricting anacondas. The green life seemed to come alive, rustling to each other in some kind of a foreign plant code. The three shining balls had demonstrated danger to the creepy life, making them feel threatened and keeping them back. Things were different now that the deadly silver balls were no longer present. Unaware, the three were left open for brutal attack.

Chimzen gazed into the forest for the last time, and breathed a big sigh of relief. Suddenly six long leafy creepers with stems as thick as a man’s arm shot out from the top of a large overhanging tree, lashing out their long lengths towards Chimzen at a tremendous speed. The six leafy vines groped at the unsuspecting wizard, clutching him with tremendous force. Before he could respond, the thick vines had coiled several times around his waist, strapping his hands to his sides and binding his staff tightly to his chest. The more the wizard struggled to free himself, the tighter they bound him, forcing his chest inwards, and making it very difficult for him to breathe.

They reeled him in like a big fish, yanking him back towards the forest. The wizard slid along the grass gasping for breath, trying desperately to call for help.

Philip and Frank turned around in absolute horror as they felt Chimzen being pulled away with the crack of a whip. The boys bolted after the creeper-bound wizard, trying their best to catch up with him. In a matter of seconds he was hauled

up the enormous tree, leaving the boys far behind, panting for breath.

The vicious creepers flung the unsuspecting wizard into the air where he was smartly collected by another five or six intellectual beast vines. As they released him, he quickly snatched his staff before it fell to the ground, with his heart almost pounding in his throat.

The creepers continued with their carefully coordinated attack, swinging Chimzen like *Tarzan of the Apes*, all the way to the outer edge of the forest. There was a fairly wide gap between the circular expanse of trees and the adjoining one, which served as no problem for the creeper brigade. Once again, another six long creepers flew out from the adjoining forest, gripping the wizard tightly around the waist. He came crashing to the ground, and was dragged across the opening on his belly, tilting his head carefully so as not to burn his face on the grass. The vine pulled in the slack once again, reeling him up a tree. Again he was swung across to the next lot of creepers for collection and so it went on.

After an exhausting session of playing Tarzan swings, the poor wizard swung to a staggering halt at the top of a very large oak tree with purple leaves. He gently swayed from side to side, suspended from six thick creepers, which had his hands tightly strapped to his sides. The wizard shook his head and gasped for air, regaining his senses from the nasty ride. His staff lay strapped tightly between his right hand and his side, something he must hold onto at any cost.

He shook his head in dismay, not really believing what was happening. 'I wonder what's going to happen to those poor boys. I'm the one telling them not to worry, that I will protect them. How will I protect them now, stuck in a tree?' His stomach was knotted from worry; he had been taken so far away from the enclosure that he had no idea where he was anymore.

The creepers slid around his waist like slippery snakes, slowly worming their way around the tree and back again. The lengths above Chimzen slithered past his face and wrapped themselves tightly around his mouth. The green life was certainly very aware of his powerful tongue, and now there would be no chance of him attempting to utter any kind of magic.

He lay there, strapped high up against the large oak tree, unable to move a limb. What on earth was he going to do now?

Chapter 13

Frank and Philip gazed upwards in disbelief, watching Chimzen disappear through the trees. Suddenly, several strange looking plant beings sprang out into the opening and surrounded the boys. The excited plants screamed loudly, slapping their little mouths as they ran. They were rather unusual, with spongy cactus like bodies without any thorns. They were about one foot tall, with a thick green spongy stem forming their body and face, as well as spongy little green arms and legs protruding from their stems. They looked quite similar to the gingerbread man, only not quite so flat. Their faces had very basic features, with little black beady button eyes and a small round hole for a mouth. Short colourful slanted stripes were painted below their eyes as well as on the ends of their arms and legs. A colourful array of petals sprouted from their waists like little skirts, flapping up and down as they ran. Bright red petals sprouted from the tops of their stems, tied together with a piece of thin green vine, forcing them to point up perfectly straight like a headdress. The funny plant beings looked very much like little Red Indians, with more and more of them leaping out from behind the trees, screaming their little green lungs out. The Indian plant had developed ways very similar to those of tribal Indians on earth, something the boys couldn't understand as being at all possible.

Frank and Philip took a step back, staring down at the peculiar plant creatures in horror.

'Run, Philip, run!' Frank screamed, standing with his fists clenched at his sides, half ready to put up a fight.

'It's too late, Frank!' Philip shouted in response, completely engulfed by hundreds of little screaming Indian plants. A large number of the little critters carried a small bow made from bamboo, strung with a thin piece of vine. Strapped over their left arms and around their stems, they carried little bags made from woven leaves, filled with sharpened sticks for arrows.

'Stand dead still Philip! Don't even try and run! These plants are going to

kill us if we try anything!’ Frank pointed at one of the armed little Indian fiends. The boys stood dead still in take-off position, looking anxiously to their left and right, with perspiration-soaked faces. Crowds of petalled warriors dashed around, screaming fear into the boys. It was completely hopeless! What on earth were they going to do now?

The boys stood watching the evil parade, hoping desperately that Chimzen would somehow come to their aid. There was no chance of that happening though; the wizard had already been very well taken care of.

The tribe of screaming Indian plants went suddenly quiet, and arranged themselves into several perfectly formed wide circles around Philip and Frank. There must have been at least two hundred or more colourful Indian plants, spread out into perfect circles; it really looked quite spectacular.

Frank and Philip gazed down at the quiet colourful formation, uncertain of what they were up to. The circular plant formations spread out slightly and spread open on the side where the forest lay, forming a pathway to the centre where the boys stood. The boys gazed down the open aisle in silence, not quite sure what to expect next. A large Indian plant appeared at the mouth of the opening and walked slowly down the aisle towards them. He appeared quite similar to the others, except he was about half a foot taller, and he had a variation of long multi-coloured petals sprouting from the top of his stem, which flowed right down his back to the ground like a spectacular headdress. The long mane of colourful petals was held back in place by a rounded wooden band, which displayed some kind of foreign emblem in front.

‘Let me guess: Indian plant chief,’ Frank muttered to himself, watching the endless rows of green warriors bow before their leader. Majestically the big chief walked down the aisle with his green arms tightly folded, not impressed with the sight of two foreign beings.

Frank and Philip looked at each other, unsure of whether to bow down or stay standing, feeling threatened by his superiority. The boys decided to get down on their knees; maybe they would gain a pardon with a show of respect. The green chief reached the front, staring at the boys with beady deadpan eyes.

‘Whah!’ he screamed in a deep mature voice, bringing the tribe to their feet with their arms pressed firmly against their sides. Frank and Philip looked around at the upright plants, surprised by their immediate response to the chief’s command.

‘Whoh whah!’ the chief screamed, while the two boys attempted to stand up.

In an instant Frank and Philip were seized by dozens of vicious Indian plants. The critters mounted the startled boys, and shoved them over backwards with brute

force. They lay trembling in fear, with hearts beating frantically. Then the vicious little Indian plants forced their arms and legs together, and bound them tightly with thin lengths of strong vine. They completely surrendered themselves,, knowing that they would only get hurt if they put up a fight. They were just far too outnumbered.

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Several feisty plant creatures forced their little green arms underneath each of the boys and lifted them off the ground. They were shoved straight into the air, rested firmly on a spongy bed of Indian plant arms, and speedily marched off into the forest. The little plants were surprisingly strong for their size, and carted the boys with ease. Under different circumstances, they would have actually quite enjoyed the ride. Things weren't all that great now though.

Occasionally a couple of them fell away from their holding positions and were immediately replaced by others. The system was quite clever, with each tribe member doing his fair share of PT by having his turn at helping carry one of the boys. It worked very much like the military; everything was coordinated carefully and done with perfect timing. The only difference was that the Chief was the only one considered suitable for rank, while the others toiled under slavery. The poor Indian plants carrying Frank seemed to tire very quickly, with him being quite a lot heavier than Philip.

The Chief marched far ahead, while the tribe members struggled to keep up, carrying their heavy cargo.

'So this is the intelligent plant life Chimzen warned us about,' Philip thought, staring at the bright blue moon in despair.

The tribe continued through the forest, scattering colourful fallen leaves in all directions. The trees and plants rustled in the darkness like a secret conversation of faint whispering. Frank and Philip noticed plants unearth themselves and shift to the side, making way for the little warriors. The dense forest had completely cleared the way for the oncoming plant tribe, allowing them to march through without a spot of trouble. It was quite clear to the boys now that the forest was filled with intelligent life, very different from the ones back home. The green life had an effective means of communication with each other, and worked hand in hand as a team. The boys were absolutely petrified, understanding the full extent of the trouble they were in.

The Indian plants marched through the forest like a horde of programmed robotic fiends and eventually reached an open clearing. They continued forward,

showing tremendous stamina, entering into the next clump of dense plants and trees.

Once again the settled bushes and plants uprooted themselves and shifted to one side, leaving an open path for the tribe to pass through. The forest was very dense and stretched out over a large area. Frank felt an itch on his chin and reached up to scratch it with his tied hands. The Indian plants reacted immediately, with one on either side jumping onto him and forcing his hands back to where they had been. Frank lay there feeling rather annoyed; his chin was begging for a scratch. He was rather surprised at how alert they were, and decided to play it safe.

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A few large wild fig type trees stood blocking the pathway, shaking their leaves as if they were angry about something.

‘Whoh whah whoh!’ the Chief cried out in three short bursts. At once the tribe started screaming and slapping their little mouths, hastily backing away from the annoyed trees.

‘They don’t seem to all agree on everything in this forest,’ Frank thought, not really understanding what all the fuss was about. The boys lay back tensing their bodies, in fear of the outraged trees trampling them to death.

Several thick vines lashed out on either side, clutching at the trunks and branches of the annoyed wild fig trees. The vines wrapped themselves firmly around the unsuspecting victims, loosening their soil embedded roots. The fig trees clutched at the earth in vain, desperately trying to plant themselves more securely. They were no match for the powerful vines though, and were smartly towed off the path still shaking their leaves in rage.

The plant chief gave the command and the tribe went instantly quiet. The boys felt themselves mobile once again, and soon passed the newly cleared area and on to the end of the forest. There were no more hiccups along the way, and if there were, the vine police would have had no problem taking care of them.

Approaching the end of the forest, the Chief signalled the tribe to halt. He stood facing his tribe, and looked up into the overhanging trees. The boys noticed that they were heavily laden with some kind of strange fruit that looked quite similar to plums; only these were bright blue.

‘Whoh, Whoh, Whoh!’ the Chief screamed, giving the boys a nasty fright. The Indian plants with bows and arrows immediately spread out and loaded their little weapons, standing ready to fire.

‘Whah Whah!’ he yelled. At the command hundreds of tiny arrows were fired into the air, nailing the blue plums with brilliant accuracy. A shower of fruit fell from the trees, landing in every direction like a sudden hailstorm. Unfortunately for Frank and Philip, they were stationed in the line of fire and were smacked by several sticky blue missiles. They yelled in agony, unable to use their hands to avert the bombardment of fruit, and were smacked repeatedly all over their vulnerable bodies. Many of the plums splattered open, leaving them in a sticky mess. One of the plums burst open on Frank’s mouth causing him to yelp in pain like a wounded puppy. He licked at the sweet juice on his throbbing lips, knowing well that he would never have the pleasure of eating one. The little plants rushed in all directions, grabbing the plums off the ground and shoving them into their little arrow bags.

Their little bows were obviously quite powerful, as not a single arrow could be found still pierced through any of the fruit lying on the ground. The boys gazed at the splattered remains in dismay. They so longed to stuff their faces with the delicious fruit; all the stress of the day was making them feel very hungry.

The party walked on and finally reached the end of the forest. They walked out across an open stretch of grass, still handling the weight of the two boys with ease.

‘Whah Whah!’ the Chief cried, turning to face his tribe. The boys were lowered to the ground with their arms firmly strapped next to their sides as the tribe stood in a circular formation. The Chief yelled a different command and the entire tribe dispersed, sitting in scattered groups to rest. Philip and Frank were left lying on their backs to stare at the shining blue moon.

‘What on earth are these creatures going to do with us?’ Philip whispered, tilting his head towards Frank with his face scrunched up in fear.

‘I have no idea Philip; these plant things are quite definitely up to no good. I would scalp the whole blinking tribe if I had the chance!’ Frank replied, raising his voice in anger.

‘Can’t we try and escape somehow Frank? Surely there must be a way?’

Frank turned his head and squinted in the direction of the scattered tribe members for a moment. Tilting his head back to Philip, he whispered loudly, ‘It’s impossible Philip! There are hundreds of them! Even if we loosen these vines and make a run for it, what about those deadly arrows they carry?’

Without saying a word, Philip gazed up at the sky in total dismay, watching as several shooting stars flashed past, leaving behind a shimmering trail of fading light.

‘Make a wish Frank!’ Philip exclaimed, focusing on one of the shooting stars.

‘A wish, how’s that going to help us if we’re dead? Don’t you get it, Philip? We’re dead!’

‘I know it sounds lame Frank, but what on earth other choice do we have?’

‘What do you mean “what on earth”? We’re not on earth, that’s exactly the problem!’

‘Just make a damned wish; at least it will give us a bit of hope!’

Frank lay silent, trying to calm his racing thoughts, and soon realized that a wish was all the hope they had.

‘You’re right my friend, what does it help to get upset anyway? It will change nothing.’

The boys lay with their eyes closed, and wished like they never had before. Although it was done in secret, I’m sure you have a pretty good idea what they were wishing for.

The Indian plants gathered in small groups, dividing the blue plums amongst themselves. The large tribe sat sucking on the fruit, drinking the liquid and discarding the pulp remains. Their little mouths were like an advanced root system, allowing them to absorb liquids through them into their thick stems. The plant chief sat surrounded by heaps of blue plums, puffing his fat stem out like a pig.

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After some time he stood up, wiping his bright blue lips on an arm, and signalled to a group of plants nearest Frank and Philip. Immediately they stood up and headed towards the boys, prepared with a long coil of fairly thick vine. The boys shrank back in fear as they approached, knowing very well that the plants were up to something evil. One of the vicious critters tossed the end of a vine over Frank’s tummy, while ten others forcefully rolled him over onto it. Grabbing the end of the vine, the tribe tied Frank tightly around the waist, leaving a long length of it to trail behind. Frank lay with his chin pressed to the ground, grunting in discomfort while they made a firm knot.

Philip looked to his left feeling hugely stressed while he watched the devil plants tie Frank. A couple of the large trees in the forest had long thick branches, which extended out over the large open grass area. They fumbled beneath Frank’s body, then slowly hoisted him above their heads and marched off with him in the direction of one of the large overhanging trees. Poor Frank was dropped nose first onto the grass under one of the extended branches, with eyes watering as he squirmed in pain.

‘Screw you, you useless bunch of plant misfits,’ he muttered, while softly rubbing his aching nose on the grass. One of the little Indian plants bounced up the large tree with ease, taking the free end of the vine attached to Frank along with him, loosely tied to his middle. In seconds he was standing directly above Frank on the thick extended branch, freeing the end of the vine from his waist. He quickly pulled the length of slack towards himself and tossed it over the thick branch, allowing it to drop to the ground on the other side. A crowd of green Indians clutched at the fallen length below, and slowly hoisted Frank up towards the branch. Surrounding groups cheered their comrades on, screaming their little lungs out as the team tugged at the vine with all their might.

The Indian plant in the tree slid down the tightened vine onto Frank’s back; then he leapt to the ground and joined the group of screaming devils. Frank could feel himself being hoisted upwards as the vine pulled tightly around his waist. Fortunately the strapped vine didn’t hurt him very much. He shook his head as he rose up into the air, half expecting to awake from a bad dream. The plants continued tugging and toiling at the vine until Frank was hoisted just below the thick branch, gently swaying from left to right like a slaughtered sheep. The Indian plants tied the end of the rope to the trunk of the tree, leaving the bewildered boy high and dry.

Philip had his head tilted back and watched his friend dangle from the tree in disbelief.

‘What the blazes are these wretched things up to?’ he muttered in disgust. The Chief commanded several groups towards the forest, pointing his arm assertively in all directions. Shortly afterwards they returned carrying pieces of dead branches and sticks gathered from the forest. The Indian plants headed straight towards Frank, placing the gathered wood directly beneath him. He looked down in absolute horror as loads of twigs and branches were piled on the ground beneath to form an enormous pile.

‘This can’t be true! Surely these barbaric green turds aren’t going to do what I think they are?’ Frank protested, spinning in circles with panic.

Philip’s heart was beating double time by then as he watched the pile of wood double in size. Right then his only wish was for the ground to open and swallow him up.

Shortly afterwards, Philip was also tied and hoisted up a tree, positioned in the closest overhanging branch next to Frank, which unfortunately was quite a fair way off. At least, a lot further than talking distance away.

‘Help, help!’ he screamed, wriggling his body in protest. The Indian plants handled Philip more forcefully, showing no concern for his frantic outcry. He

calmed himself, realizing that his struggle was in vain. The two boys hung from the trees bitter with despair, and gazed at each other across the wide open clearing. When the little plants had finished placing a large pile of wood beneath Philip, they proceeded to make a pile of wood of their own, positioned more or less in the centre of the open field.

The entire tribe must have been collecting wood for over an hour, gathering a tremendous pile to make the king of bonfires.

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The Indian plant chief signalled to the tribe to stand in a circular formation. The plants gathered together, standing in complete silence while the Chief slowly approached the large central pile of wood. He knelt before it, bowing down to show respect to the fire. Immediately the entire tribe dropped to the ground with arms stretched forward.

‘Whih!’ he squeaked, looking over to his left. Immediately one of the Indian plants stepped out to the front, bowing down; he handed the Chief a block of wood with a thin sharp stick and returned to his position. The Chief placed the block of wood on the ground and began twisting the stick against it very rapidly. Shortly the block began to smoulder, and started releasing clouds of wispy white smoke. He grabbed a dry leaf from the pile and ignited it with the smouldering block. Then he leaned forward with the burning leaf and placed it carefully under a pile of sticks and leaves, igniting the edge of the enormous pile.

‘Whih Whih!’ he cried, and bowed down several times before the mighty god of fire. The entire tribe followed suit, showing the maximum respect to their blazing god. A few of the plant Indians jumped forward with dry leaves, snatching a flame from the fire, and hopped around the enormous pile, evenly setting it ablaze. Returning to their positions, the entire tribe remained in an attitude of silent respect as the flames billowed into a raging bonfire.

Frank and Philip watched the procession from afar, not clearly able to see what the Indian plants were doing.

‘Oh my goodness, it looks like fire!’ Frank exclaimed in fright, catching a glimpse of a small flame in the distance, his neck hair standing up on end.

Philip hung in silence with his mouth opening and closing like a goldfish, not coping very well with the harshness of the situation. The fire soon erupted into an enormous bonfire, raging fiercely in the dark. The shimmering light of fear reflected brightly in Frank and Philip’s eyes.

Then a voice of authority bellowed a painful, long-winded command.

‘Whoh! Whah! Whoh! Whah! – Whah! Whah! Whoh!’

The tribe immediately stood upright from their pose of worship, screaming a weird blood-curdling chant, and proceeded to dance and jump in circles around the raging fire. Each circular formation of screaming plants moved in opposite directions to each other, creating a spiral of wicked movement in worship of the eternal god of fire.

The blue moon shone brightly, lighting up the starry sky, and projected a sinister clarity over the tribal gathering. They continued with their wicked circular dance, looking spectacular with their brightly coloured petals and clever tribal motion under the bright moonlight and blazing fire surrounding them. I must say this really was a sight to see; the boys would have surely appreciated the spectacular dance a lot more if the circumstances had been different.

They swayed from their trees in despair, finding the wicked dance far from entertaining, knowing very well that their time was near. Philip looked up at the bright moonlit sky, hoping and praying for a large rain cloud to form.

‘Please rain, please rain, pleeeeeease,’ he begged, with tears of hopelessness splashing from his freckled cheeks.

It was useless; other than a few scattered streaks of cloud there was absolutely no sign of any rain.

‘Come on, you useless bunch of greenhouse rejects! I’ll trash the lot of you on that big fire of yours and incinerate you like garden refuse!’ Frank lashed out, swaying in violent circles, his face bright red with rage. Unfortunately, Frank’s feeble protest was only giving him a terrible headache and forcing the vine to twist tighter around his waist. Frank calmed himself, taking deep breaths as he swayed to a standstill.

‘What’s the use of struggling, now this blasted vine is cutting into my side?’ Frank complained, feeling completely helpless.

Philip stared at the pile of wood below with tear-stained cheeks.

‘Well, if it’s not going to rain, I’ll soak these logs myself,’ he mumbled, with a desperate idea popping into his head. Clutching at his very last hope, he began sucking viciously at the base of his mouth, and filled it with as much saliva as he could possibly hold. After a good long suck his cheeks were bulging with spit. Now he was ready to drop the bomb. There was no way that these green cannibals were going to roast him alive!

Phat! Philip launched a large ball of spit onto the wood below, believing for a moment that he could wet it sufficiently to prevent the fire from taking.

Three mouthfuls later, his cheeks were throbbing and only his shirt was damp. Philip realized how feeble his idea was and gave it up as a bad joke. He would need at least a bath full of spit to make any significant difference.

The tribal dance continued for quite some time and the enormous bonfire gradually died down into a large bed of hot coals. The dance seemed to go on for an eternity, and the boys were feeling quite sick staring across at the pagan tribe, waiting for the inevitable.

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‘Why don’t you kill us and get it over with, green devils?’ Frank shouted in disgust. No sooner had he spoken, when two bright coals were seen in the distance, bobbing across the field towards them like a pair of deadly fireflies. Two of the little plants were carrying long sticks glowing brightly with fiery tips. The fire holders led the way as the entire tribe followed behind, in four straight lines. The four long lines separated; two followed the one flame leader and the other two followed the other leader. One group marched towards Philip and the other one towards Frank.

‘Oh shucks, here they come!’ Frank screamed, wriggling on the vine in fear. ‘We’re doomed!’

Philip stared across at the approaching tribe in horror, with the hairs on his neck standing up on end.

‘Chimzen! Where are you Chimzen?’ he cried, wondering what had happened to his beloved friend.

The tribal chief leader stood in the open field, a short distance away from the boys, somewhere in between the two large overhanging trees. The fire holders positioned themselves in front of the prepared wood piled neatly below the boys. The two rows of Indian plants positioned themselves in two neat circles around the prepared wood, waiting patiently for their leader to give the command.

Frank and Philip stared down at the devilish group, not quite able to accept the reality.

‘You worship fire hey! That’s exactly where you are going when you die, treacherous creatures, you are going to hell!’ Frank screamed, kicking his legs forward like a small child having a tantrum. The little plants stood dead still like robots programmed for destruction, not taking the slightest bit of notice. Philip swayed from the branch in silence, wishing the nightmare was over. Gazing at the cruel tribe below, his heart thumped rapidly, fearfully waiting for his painful end.

‘Whih! Whah! Whih!’ the plant chief cried with authority, commanding the fire

holders to light the wood. They immediately placed the burning sticks beneath the stack, and ignited the twigs and leaves below. Within seconds, flames rose from the huge pile and spread rapidly over the dry wood like a scorching monster of death. Once again the Chief gave the command and the tribe bowed quietly before the mighty god of fire.

‘No ways, this can’t be happening, I must be dreaming,’ Frank moaned, shaking his head in disbelief, and wriggling about frantically like a worm on a hook. The boys were high up in the trees and could already feel the fire gently warming their legs. If only they hadn’t listened to Chimzen, they might still have been monkeys, but at least they would have been live monkeys.

‘Whih! Whah! Wheh!’ the plant chief screamed, commanding the tribe to their feet. Once again the pagan tribe danced in a circular motion around the fire, weaving in and out through each other, and screaming at the top of their voices. The panic-stricken boys gazed down at the wicked dance, lifting their legs in horror as the flames leaped up around them.

Chapter 14

Chimzen was strapped high up in the oak tree, battling to move as the vicious coils of creeper tightly bound his chest and face. He struggled to inhale through his nostrils as they were almost concealed by a coil of vine covering his mouth. His chest was bound tightly by several powerful looped creepers which only allowed his lungs limited movement to inhale. He tried to calm himself to prevent suffocation from desperate panting, and allow his restricted lungs to slowly draw fresh air in through his semi-covered nostrils. It was hard to believe that these killer plants were the ones actually supplying him with oxygen, and now they were the ones depriving him of it as well.

His hands were strapped firmly at his sides, allowing his fingers a bit of free movement. ‘If only I could speak, I would be out of this mess in seconds,’ he thought, feeling terribly frustrated. The creeper forced his head hard against the tree, cutting into his face and tightly sealing his lips. He fumbled at his side for a long while, desperately in search of the opening to his pocket. It was useless, he just couldn’t find it; his hands were bound too tightly and he couldn’t reach down low enough with his eager fingertips. ‘Blast these vines! This is ridiculous! How am I supposed to escape from this mess?’

Once again he forced his fingers down, only this time he clutched his garment and gathered it into bunches. He tugged carefully at the folds of materials, searching desperately for an opening. ‘Where the blazes is my pocket?’ Perspiration poured from his face in torrents as he released his crumpled robe in frustration, panting heavily through his nostrils with no success in finding it.

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In the meantime, down below at the base of the tree, a large group of about fifty thraxten cactus leeches were slowly crawling up the crusty trunk, thirsty for the wizard’s blood. The thraxten leech was a nasty little critter. Its name gave a pretty

good description of its appearance and nature. It was roughly the size of a tennis ball, only shaped more like a slug. It had a hard dark green body designed for perfect camouflage, with a row of long sharp cactus spikes running down its length. The leech had a soft spongy sticky base, very much like a common garden snail, used to transport it. It not only used its sticky base to aid movement but for sucking and feeding as well. Usually only eating vegetation, it would coil up into a ball and roll over a nice juicy apple or plum, spiking it full of holes, and extracting the juice with ease. Today was a special treat for the thraxten cactus leeches; they were going to feast on the blood of a wizard.

Completely unaware of the approaching cactus vampires, Chimzen groped at his robe once again, searching futilely for his missing pocket. The beastly group of bloodsuckers were nearing the top of the tree by now, sliding up for an early breakfast.

He tugged at the material, this time pulling it out from behind. Once again he carefully bunched the silky folds together, and reeled the garment in as far as his restricted fingers would allow. He slowly slipped them in between the folds of cloth, and fumbled for a few long moments in silent anguish.

‘I’ve got it! I don’t believe it! I’ve finally found this damned pocket of mine!’ he screamed loudly in his thoughts, blasting through his nostrils in relief.

As he worked his long fingers into the sleek opening, he felt a sharp stabbing sensation on his right shin. Fortunately his legs weren’t bound, so he lashed his right leg forward in pain and sent one of the leeches plummeting to the ground.

‘What on earth was that?’ His cheeks went bright red in response to the sharp spikes piercing his leg, and he scrunched his face in agony as the blood oozed from his shin. He held his pocket tightly, careful not to lose his grip at any cost. Alarmed by the sudden stabbing, he fumbled hurriedly into his pocket and pulled out his little pocket knife.

He slowly drew it into his bound hand, careful not to let it slip and drop to the ground. The little blade appeared quite feeble against the thick coils of the creeper, and his attempt at an escape looked almost impossible.

Chimzen wheezed through his nose, finding it more and more difficult to breathe with all the activity. Perspiration dripped onto his robe while he flicked open the little blade. Pointing the sharp instrument downwards, he started rubbing his thumb against its handle in a small circular motion. ‘What on earth was that?’ he thought, getting a nasty fright as one of the bloodsuckers attached itself to the open wound. ‘That’s strange, it feels almost like a warm wet rag.’ Holding the knife firmly, he repeatedly flung his leg forward in an effort to rid himself of the sucking

parasite. It clung to him firmly, not in the slightest bit disturbed by all the frantic kicking. He scrunched his face in agony as the bloodsucker increased pressure on his wounded leg, drawing out volumes of blood. He tried to calm himself again but found it more and more difficult to breathe. He had to stay motionless for a while to draw the air deeply in through his nostrils, and prevent himself from becoming panic-stricken.

‘Ouch!’ And again another one rolled up over his left leg, spiking him with a row of gaping holes. The poor wizard flung his left leg forward in fright, and sent the leech hurtling to the ground before it could attach itself and suck his blood.

‘I must get down from here, before this thing sucks the life out of me,’ he thought, fumbling desperately with the little knife. Keeping his legs raised up this time, he rubbed the small knife handle with his thumb, clockwise three times and anti-clockwise three times. Instantly the knife blade sprang out, increasing to about five times its usual length. The long blade started smoking, and rapidly turned from ordinary steel into a deadly sword of fire.

He forced the fiery blade up towards the binding creepers, severing through them with the greatest of ease. The air filled with an unpleasant smell of roasted sap as the knife scorched through the solid coils. As the fire surged through their severed coils, the stubborn creepers binding his body released their grip with the sound of a cracking whip. His staff slipped from his side and went hurtling towards the ground.

Unfortunately for him, a creeper was still tightly strapped around his face, holding his head firmly against the tree. It cut into his cheeks with his full body weight suspended from it. Careful not to cause himself any harm, the struggling wizard placed the fiery sword cautiously next to his face and scorched the last of the dangerous coils.

Now this was the tricky part: finally free from the snare, he came plummeting towards the ground. In absolutely no time at all he removed a bottle of creamy red ointment from his right pocket and swiftly rubbed a blob onto each one of his shoe soles.

‘Yes I did it! Just in time!’ he triumphed, landing feet first on the ground below and bouncing back up into the air, reaching almost the same height from which he had just fallen. Fortunately he had taken the magic jumping ointment with him that Squidget had demonstrated in his tree house with the boys, otherwise he would have been as flat as a pancake.

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He launched quite a distance before bouncing to a standstill, dodging trees and bushes along the way. He puffed and panted, having a short rest from his desperate struggle. He was very relieved to be back on solid ground again. He held the fiery sword in his left hand and turned it towards the parasite attached to his right leg.

‘How dare you suck on me, you filthy leech!’ he shouted, slashing the cactus leech several times across its prickly back in anger. The smouldering sticky remains folded over and rolled to the ground. He clutched his throbbing leg and carefully examined his blood-soaked shin. It really wasn’t a very pleasant sight, and it stung like fire.

Chimzen looked up into the trees, staring at all the shifting outlines of the leaves and branches against the bright moonlit sky. His eyes appeared glazed as he limped back to the tree, where he had first been held captive, to find his precious staff. He could feel his blood starting to boil as the adrenaline surged rapidly through his veins. He marched on, ignoring the pain in his legs, while his body trembled with fury. The wicked forest loomed above him waiting for an opportunity to seize, but too threatened by the fiery sword to take any immediate action. Two brave creepers lashed out from the ground in an attempt to drag the wizard off his feet.

‘Don’t you even dare!’ he yelled, jumping high into the air out of harm’s reach. As he descended to the ground, another four vines flung themselves at him from the trees directly above. He lashed out his fiery sword, slashing all four vines in one determined swoop.

Seemingly harmless flowers, quite similar looking to sunflowers, only with multicoloured petals, uprooted themselves and sprang out in front of the furious wizard. They tilted their wide flower heads up at a slight angle like homing cannons on a gunship, and began firing their hard black seeds at the unsuspecting wizard. The seeds stung his wounded legs, causing him to yell in pain.

He flung himself at the wicked plants, slashing them into pieces with his deadly sword. Singed flower petals and plant stems flew in all directions, spread across the ground like a glorified wedding ceremony. The raging wizard took a flying leap into the air to escape the sudden onslaught of feisty plants attacking from all directions.

As he landed, six creepers attacked from behind, binding him tightly and strapping him firmly to a tree once again. The fierce jolt forced the fiery sword out of his hand, and it flared to the ground below like a wasted petrol bomb.

He gasped for air, feeling relieved that at least the twisting creeper hadn’t strapped his mouth closed. He had to think quickly though because he was strapped to the base of the tree and the army of plants was fast approaching.

‘Now how does it go? What is it? Why can’t people ever remember anything when they are under pressure?’ he muttered, trying to remember the relevant spell that his life depended on. ‘Ah yes! I’ve got it! Thank goodness!’

‘Little pocket knife, powerful fiery sword!’

Come perform your magic, release me from these cords!’

In an instant the fiery sword sprang up from the ground and made a dart towards the anxiously awaiting wizard. The fiery blade slashed through the creepers like a skilled chef chopping vegies, taking extra care not to hurt its master. The remains of the leafy vines hastily retreated and disappeared into the darkness.

At this stage the troop of plants were firing their nasty seeds from all directions, only angering him all the more. He jumped clear of the surrounding plants and headed back swiftly in search of his staff. His poor right leg was in a lot of pain and all the jumping wasn’t helping his shins very much. The creepers seemed to have learnt their lesson and stopped plaguing him for the time being. However, every other plant in the forest was up in petals, making his search as difficult as possible.

‘I think this is where I dropped it,’ he muttered, fumbling in amongst the fallen leaves under a large oak tree.

‘I only hope that these treacherous plants haven’t taken it and hidden it somewhere.’ He was deeply worried, with no sign of the precious magic stick. He turned around hastily; it felt like he had been shot several times with a pellet gun and his back stung terribly.

‘Ouch! You tribe of petalled weeds! I’ll kill the lot of you!’ he roared, inundated by dozens of vicious brightly coloured guerrilla flowers, spitting seeds at him from all directions. He lashed out his flaming sword in rage, decapitating several warring plants at the stem, and stripping them of dangerous seed ammunition. This made no impact on the determined troop. They continued marching forward with hope of victory by sheer numbers.

Gaining temporary control of the militant sunflower brigade, Chimzen looked around and noticed several similar oak trees with purple leaves lined up next to each other.

‘I must have been mistaken, I was looking under the wrong tree,’ he muttered, confronting a hail of nasty seed. ‘I need some space. This never ending green army is becoming impossible to control.’

Holding the fiery blade up to the sky he addressed the little sword:

‘Little pocket knife, powerful fiery sword,

Slashing fiercely in the night, at your own accord,

*With the skill of a Samurai and the deadly warring knight,
Go forth in victory, slashing deadly plants left and right.'*

After chanting the powerful spell, he flung the blazing sword into the air and watched as the fiery blade slashed forward to confront the determined plants. Rubbing his hands together, the wizard smirked as the sword independently sliced the plant bandits into blazing little pieces. The confrontation was meaningless to the sword. The faster they attacked the more swiftly it defended. Whatever tactics they used were useless against the incredible potency and accuracy of the fiery blade.

'Ah good! Now I can continue with my search.' Chimzen was not impressed with the persistently aggressive attitude that possessed Floran. He would never resort to such violence under normal circumstances, but these circumstances weren't really normal.

* * * * *

Breathing a big sigh of relief, he limped to the next oak tree and searched the ground carefully, but there was nothing to be found.

'I suppose I could summon it,' he thought, scratching his beard, 'but it would have to be somewhere in hearing range. Let me try.'

He raised his arms over his head and began to chant in a foreign language:

'Ke bres kan te riste han jiste, ka zes toe kis!'

He heard a rustling sound under a tree slightly further on. His staff popped out from under a pile of dead leaves; it came flying towards him, and landed neatly across his outstretched hands.

'Oh so that's where you were hiding! So glad to have you safely back!' he cried, giving it a smacking kiss on the handle.

He held his old friend firmly at his side, while watching the magical sword shred thousands of determined guerrilla plants. Scorched flower heads and singed petals lay scattered in all directions, piled up in large sticky smouldering heaps. The forest beings were determined to have their victory no matter what the cost.

Chimzen shook his head, not at all pleased with their wicked warring attitude.

'I only hope that those poor boys are still alive; judging by my current situation there's a good chance that they will both be dead by now.' He knew that they were his responsibility and he would never forgive himself if they had come to any harm.

He decided to head back to the open enclosure where they had found the Frego

flower. He might have a better idea of where to start hunting for them if he went back there. Most importantly, he needed to find the trio because they would assist him greatly with the search. It had been a very long night for him and the sun would fortunately rise within a couple of hours, placing things into a far clearer perspective.

Chimzen had a fairly good sense of direction and headed back towards the open enclosure, limping slightly from the pain in his legs. The ground was a mess with scattered remains of warring plants. The fiery sword floated up ahead, always ready to slay its next victim. He quickly looked around, tripping over a heap of scorched plant matter. He could hear the familiar sound of dinosaur screams echoing not too far behind.

‘Oh no, not them again!’ he cried in frustration. ‘I’m sick and tired of all this nonsense!’ Rapidly approaching from behind were an army of three legged leafy balls, screeching at the top of their cabbage lungs. The forest was in the process of waging a full-scale war, sending in deadly reinforcements gathered from all over. The green balls approached him at an amazing speed, hurtling forward on their springy spinach legs. There must have been over a thousand of them, all different sizes, flapping open and closed like a crocodile in a feeding frenzy, each displaying several rows of brown twiggy teeth.

The little fiery sword made a sudden U-turn, eager to confront the cabbage ball army head-on. Chimzen leapt into the air, launching himself as far forward as he possibly could. He must have jumped tree height, leaving an enormous gap between himself and the approaching Brussels sprout army. The poor little sword was overwhelmed by the enormous onslaught, and struggled to keep the leafy beasts at bay.

The fiery sword lashed forward showing spectacular skill, slashing the leafy monsters by the dozen, and leaving behind a pile of scorched salad. It was no use; the poor little sword just couldn’t cope with an army of such magnitude. The balls sprinted ahead, forcing the little sword to one side. Their numbers were far too much for the little fiery blade to cope with and only allowed it a few insignificant slashes.

Chimzen had gained a fair amount of ground by then, and the wicked screeching sounds were well out of hearing range. He stood quietly for a moment to take in a few deep breaths, his face an expression of agony.

Then the furious wizard grabbed his staff with both hands and held it high above his head. His body was shaking with a rush of adrenaline and his eyes glowed like a raging furnace.

‘Now you have really pushed things too far, you treacherous green scum!’ he yelled, pushed to the end of his supply of abundant patience. Then he proceeded to reveal the side of him no one wishes to see – a side not easily provoked, yet a side as real as day is to night:

*‘Precision carved from a tree!
Finest wood ascribed to me!
Absorb my power faithful tool!
Let neon purple magic rule!
A great protective power shield!
Reactive surge my fear must yield!
Rotate above me this very night!
God help this place if I should fright!’*

Totally fed up, the wizard chanted the potent rhyme. With those words, he released the staff and watched it hover directly above him with an uneven wagon wheel rhythm. His eyes were alight like fiery coals as he watched the magic staff rotate gently above like a ceiling fan on a low speed. It glowed neon purple, alive with gentle surges of electrical energy. The neon purple current spilled from either end like electric splashing water and connected to the ground below, emitting wild sparks on contact. He took several deep breaths to calm himself in his volatile frame of mind, and proceeded almost cautiously with his journey.

The forest watched as he walked, unthreatened by the neon purple glow. They saw no sign of the fiery sword, and this was to them the perfect opportunity to seize him.

Again six leafy creepers lashed out from the trees. He was all too familiar with the whipping sound they made, and quickly turned to face the attackers. The creepers had made a big mistake; it wasn’t a very good idea to increase his blood pressure; it would have a certain negative effect on their general wellbeing.

The staff immediately responded to his increased heart rate and started to spin faster. The calm electrical surge increased its intensity, rising off the ground and lashing out fiercely in all directions. The creepers were administered an incredibly powerful surge of neon purple voltage, roasting them to oblivion. Nearby trees and plants all took the hit, and the powerful current transformed them into a smouldering sticky mess within an instant.

Chimzen’s blood pressure continued to rise as a result of the unsettling disturbance, causing the staff to accelerate in an uneven motion. The staff resembled a miniature big wheel like the ones seen at a crowded carnival. It was all lit up with

brilliant ultra-violet light spinning wildly out of control, in the process of erupting into a magnificent neon electrical storm of atomic proportion.

The wizard inhaled deeply several times, trying his best to keep calm and remain in control of his unstable emotions. The magic stick had already absorbed an incredible amount of negative stress energy by then, which caused it to spin dangerously out of control, spreading the fiery electrical storm out further. It destroyed every demonic shrub and tree within close range, reducing them all to ashes.

After a long moment of serious concentration, he managed to stifle his anger. The rotating staff slowed down drastically, and the unpredictable white electrical surges slowly settled to the ground once again.

The staff resumed a slow wobble, with streaks of purple electricity flowing to the earth like an unpredictable live wire, spraying purple-white sparks in all directions.

Chimzen's face was pale and he looked quite ill. The smell coming from the smouldering remains was absolutely horrible. It wasn't just a smell of smouldering plant matter; it was like the destruction of an underlying ghastly evil.

'I guess you had better tell your leafy ball friends to quit while they're ahead! Unless you really want to learn a lesson!' he yelled, addressing the forest like an intensely paranoid madman, just escaped from psychiatric lock-up. 'I think I'm wasting my time. You are so wicked you will challenge me to your bitter end!'

He heard the leafy beasts screaming in the distance and could feel his heart rate accelerating rapidly. The staff glowed brightly, rapidly increasing its rotation speed, and caused the earthed neon purple energy to rise off the ground with violent fury. He turned to face the oncoming army, literally panting with rage.

'I-have-had-enough!' he roared, his blood pressure rising to a dangerous level, causing his face to glow brightly red.

The neon purple power surge leaped up, extending outwards like an electrical disruption at a power station, with neon purple and white tongues of deadly voltage licking at the surroundings in white flames of swooping vengeance. The incredible sound was earthshattering, like witnessing a powerful thunderstorm directly below the crashing clouds. A mighty wind blew over the forest, generated by the magnificent rush of neon purple energy.

Chimzen stood his ground firmly while the staff wheel rose higher into the air. It generated a powerful gusting wind, forcing him back like a powerful helicopter taking off in an open field. His robe and hair slapped wildly against his body while he leaned forward to try and maintain his balance. The spinning staff no longer

rotated with an unstable wagon wheel rhythm; instead it spun like the wheels of a formula one racing car taking the bends at 200 miles per hour. It appeared as an enormous glowing neon purple disc with powerhouse voltage lapping in between its tremendous velocity, with neon light arms of super electrical current spreading across the land like crashing tsunami waves of destruction. The blast was like nuclear fission, with everything in a mile's radius completely incinerated – trees and plants there one moment, gone the next.

Before they could even see it coming, the electrical surge blasted across the leafy ball army like a tidal wave of nuclear destruction, roasting them in entirety within a second. They approached the wizard with blind fury, having no clue as to the magnitude of his power. He had harmed their kind and this was payback for them. Little did they know, they had chosen the wrong wizard to pick a fight with.

Nothing was left of the cabbage troop other than ash and several shells of hollow teeth.

Trees and plants of every description all received the electric chair for their wicked behaviour. All that was left was an enormous circular field of ash, a clear starry sky, and a bright shining moon.

The little fiery sword returned to its master, unscathed by the potent electric storm.

Chimzen reached out his hand to receive the helpful little fighter, looking pleased by its determined efforts. Grabbing the little sword by the handle, he rubbed it in a circular motion with his thumb, three times anti-clockwise and three times clockwise. Immediately the fiery sword transformed to a short steel blade, and was restored to an ordinary little pocket knife in an instant. Letting out a big sigh, he returned the magic blade to his pocket and continued wearily with his journey.

Chapter 15

The trio passed through the little earth ball entering back into planet Floran. Unfortunately the earth ball wasn't in Chimzen's pocket any longer; he had accidentally dropped it in the enclosure when he had been whipped up by the creepers.

'Oh no! I wonder what has become of our beloved master!' Zen squeaked in distress, spinning frantically in circles around the other two Malcos.

'Well it's no use stressing, Zen, we just have to explore our options!' Zip snapped, spinning in front of the two. 'Let's split up and all go separate ways. We have a far better chance of finding them that way with so much land to cover.'

'You're right Zip, we can just signal each other if one of us has any luck,' Zen agreed, half admiring the lady Malco's wisdom yet never willing to admit it. 'What do you think, Zet?'

'That's cool with me balls,' Zet answered, usually content with the other two's decisions.

'Let's meet back here in two hours; if we haven't had any luck we can move to plan "B",' Zen stated, trying to sound in control of the situation.

Without another word spoken, the radiant trio shot off in opposite directions in search of their master and his friends.

Even though the balls travelled at a tremendous speed, the area they were trying to encompass was endless and they were way off course. They glowed brightly like large fireflies, zipping speedily in and out of the trees. The forests were vast, with endless similar stretches, and the trio must have mistakenly covered many areas a few times during their frantic search.

Two hours had passed and the frustrated trio returned to the open enclosure, unsuccessful with their search.

'Well, what was plan "B", Zen?' Zip squeaked, sounding hot and bothered.

'I er uh! You know!' Zen answered, glowing red with embarrassment.

'No I don't know!' Zip snapped, brushing against her brother ball in anger.

‘That’s why I asked you in the first place, you oval twit!’

‘That’s enough!’ Zet interrupted, much to their surprise. ‘I have a plan “B”!’

Zen and Zip hovered in silence, anxiously waiting for Zet to continue. Zen breathed a low sigh of relief, glad to be rescued from the hot seat.

‘You see, it’s like this; our master is aware that we are looking for him, and I’m quite sure that he will give us a sign of some sort. What we need to do is split up as before, only this time we must hover over the forest instead of in between the trees. That way we will spot him if he sends up a smoke signal or something. I’m quite sure that he will; he’s very wise you know, I mean he did create us after all, didn’t he?’

‘Yes, but what if he’s trapped somewhere and can’t move?’ Zip asked, not at all happy with Zet’s idea, mainly because it wasn’t hers in the first place.

‘I think it’s a great idea!’ Zet exclaimed, always keen to agree to disagree with his sister ball. ‘Has our master ever had a problem escaping from trouble in the past?’

‘I guess you’re right,’ Zip answered, sounding a bit hesitant. Having a pair of male balls taking the victory over her wasn’t her idea of fun. It was difficult for Zip to take a stand, being outnumbered like that.

‘Let’s go then! We’ve wasted enough time already!’ Zen screamed, flying off in a hurry.

The trio shot off in opposite directions at the speed of lightning, flying straight up into the sky to capture a clear view of the forest below.

‘This seems like a silly idea to me,’ Zip muttered, flying past a dark patch of trees below. ‘This has to be an utter complete waste of time. My poor master is most probably being suffocated by some horrid plant beast as I speak.’

* * * * *

No sooner had she spoken, than an enormous electrical fire storm erupted in the distance, triggered by Chimzen in his furious rage.

The aerial view was quite spectacular as the electrical light surges spread out across the forest like deadly tongues of neon purple fire, incinerating everything in sight. The little ball gasped in fright as she watched the sudden explosive blast erupt over the forest below, generating a mighty wind that nearly blasted her off course. Zip launched forward like a bullet to gain a clear view of the destruction below.

She gazed down at the enormous circular stretch of desolate black earth in

amazement, knowing only one person could be responsible for such an act of power.

‘Master! Master! I’ve found you!’ she cried, rocketing downwards, overjoyed to have finally found the wizard. The other two Malcos could hear the distant rumbling, and without a second invitation they spun back in the direction of the violent tremor.

Zip carefully pinpointed the centre of the gigantic circular ash heap, and released her control, allowing gravity to pull her downwards at a constantly increasing speed.

‘That’s him! That’s my master!’ she screamed, noticing the neon purple staff rotating calmly above Chimzen’s wispy white head. A few seconds later the little ball popped in front of her master, bobbing up and down with glee.

‘Ah ha ha! It’s good to see you again, my precious Zip!’ the wizard cried out in surprise. The dismal look of despair disappeared in an instant and his face came alive with an exploding smile.

‘He he! I’m so glad to see you alive, master!’ Zip squeaked, rolling herself affectionately against his chest.

‘Where are the other two?’

His face was as white as a ghost and he stared about the ash piled land, looking very disoriented and confused.

‘Don’t worry master, they will be here soon; we had to split up to try and find you.’

‘That was your idea, no doubt?’ he asked, stroking the little ball lovingly in one hand with his fingers.

‘Well of course, master, I’m the lady with all the brains,’ Zip replied shyly, rattling inside his hand and giggling softly. She was chuffed with all the attention she was receiving. It always felt good to have favour with her master, even though it meant telling a little white lie.

* * * * *

Unfortunately the trio were constructed from the finest magical ingredients of truth and Zip’s little lie reflected from her shimmering body like tiny festering black spots which only Chimzen could see. Zip’s little sin weighed her down like a ball and chain, polluting her goodness to the point of becoming unbearable. He noticed the little lie choking the silver ball, but decided to let it do its work in her as a one time lesson. She was not entirely to blame though; it would be difficult for anyone to remain pure in such a treacherous place, a planet capable of draining the

goodness from anything.

Shortly afterwards the other two Malco balls were reunited with their master. He was beginning to feel a lot better than he had been now that he was united with his precious friends. He was very worried about Philip and Frank though, not knowing how he was to locate them, or if they were still alive.

He looked up and addressed his staff, rattling off in a foreign language. The magic stick spun to a halt and returned to its usual dull finish. He reached out and grabbed it, placing it smartly at his side.

‘Hopefully I won’t be needing purple power surges again,’ he said, gazing across the gloomy stretch of desolate land, and shaking his head in disappointment.

Chapter 16

The fire spread across the chunks of dry wood rapidly, and the boys held their legs up in absolute horror, choking on the thick rising smoke. The billowing smoke burnt Frank's eyes, forcing him to look up, away from the rising flames. Philip's eyes were also stinging and he was finding it difficult to breathe. Coughing and spluttering, Philip looked away from the raging fire and blinked rapidly to soothe his aching eyes.

After blinking his eyes clear, Frank glanced forward and noticed several long shadows stretching out over the field.

'What can those possibly be? Please save us someone, please save us.' He desperately wanted to be free of this nasty predicament. The poor boy burst into a fit of coughing, smothered by dense smoke. He could feel the intense heat of the raging fire below and was nearing panic stations. He noticed the shadows lengthen, approaching eerily yet suddenly from the far end of the forest.

Philip on the other hand didn't notice much at all, only that the thick smoke was going to kill him before the fire had a chance to, which wouldn't have really been such a bad thing. He exploded into a violent fit of coughing as the pagan Indian plants screamed war cries of death below.

It was absolutely unbearable; the intense heat caused them to sweat like a pair of mine workers. It felt to them as if their blood was beginning to boil, and their clothes were so sticky and hot on their bodies that they would surely burst into flames at any moment.

* * * * *

Long streaky shadows headed towards the smouldering fire at the centre of the open field.

'What's that?' Frank exclaimed, spotting a vague image through the wispy white clouds of thick smoke. 'It looks like a walking tree! Yes, it is a tree! In fact

it's a whole group of trees!'

That is exactly what they were – a group of at least twenty wild fig trees, protesting the use of deadly fire. The forest had given the Indian plant "written in the soil consent" to use fire in an open area of safety, strictly for religious purposes only. However, the fig trees were up in branches over this, knowing very well how environmentally destructive the flame could be to Floran, with massive destruction caused in the past by its careless misuse. The determined trees were planted firmly in their beliefs and would stop at nothing to put an end to this vicious crime.

The thick-barked protestors leapt forward on their sturdy roots, shaking their shiny display of colourful leaves in anger as they marched. They arrived at the centre of the fire within seconds and each one bravely leapt onto the glowing coals in turn, scattering small pieces of burning embers in all directions, shortly putting an end to the dangerous fire. Fortunately, their large spread of roots were all packed nicely with mud, making the procedure as painless for them as possible.

The Indian chief raised his arm, and the screaming plant tribe quieted immediately. The plant chief was furious and let out a spine-chilling cry, lashing his arm forward viciously towards the wild fig trees. The little tribe responded, racing towards the protesting trees, and screaming at the top of their little lungs.

Frank noticed what the trees had done and screamed out loudly, 'Over here trees! Over here! Please put out this fire! Please!!'

Philip held his legs up high, but was not coping very well with the intense heat, and felt nauseous from the overwhelming thick clouds of smoke. The poor boy was semi-conscious and confused as the result of an oxygen shortage, and he didn't have the slightest clue what was going on.

The Indian plant tribe quickly prepared their little bows and fired dozens of sharp arrows in the direction of the fig trees. The trees were nailed with the arrows and shook their leaves in rage. They flung their spiked trunks forward and dashed towards the screaming tribe, using their bushy leaves as shields. The little Indian tribe was no match for the furious group, jumping to the side as the trees' enormous roots came crashing down on them.

Several more little arrows were fired, spiking the trees like a dart board. The little Indian plants were quite determined to have the victory. The little arrows only made the determined trees extremely angry, and they crashed forward like a herd of stampeding elephants, crushing several unsuspecting Indian plants along the way. A tree of that size could quite easily squash at least ten of the little critters underneath its large spread of roots, crushing them into a sticky green pulp with colourful stripes and tattered petals.

The Indian plant chief gazed over the remains of his precious tribe and realized it was time to admit defeat.

‘Whah! Whah! Wheh!’ he screamed, hastily summoning his tribe to surrender. He turned around and dashed off into the forest, followed by the remainder of his defeated tribe.

The boys were really starting to feel the heat by now and they both hung with their legs pulled right up. That wasn’t helping them very much though; they were stinging from the heat and it was becoming quite unbearable. Philip was trying his best to stay alert for as long as possible by taking slow deep breaths to prevent himself falling unconscious.

In between the coughing and spluttering Frank enjoyed a moment of satisfaction, when he noticed the sticky remains of half the plant tribe scattered in all directions.

‘That will teach them, good for nothing plant filth,’ he muttered in disgust.

He braced himself, watching the wild fig trees approach, with the last few trampling what was left of the sticky Indian plants’ remains, just to make certain of a job well done.

‘Hurry up! Help! Help!’ Frank screamed, shaking his body around as if it would assist in moving them along.

The smoke had died down and the fire was really starting to flare into a raging furnace. Philip inhaled deeply, looking across at the approaching fig trees. Even though he didn’t trust them, he really didn’t care who helped him; he was absolutely desperate. Too bad if the boys wanted a burial service, a cremation would just have to do.

‘Help! Help! Help!’

The fig trees divided into two separate groups like a troop of fire fighters performing a drill. One of the teams headed towards Frank and the other towards Philip, marching in an orderly fashion, short of firemen’s hats and a hosepipe. They jogged towards the campfires with feisty determination as if an entire building was set ablaze.

The boys couldn’t believe their eyes when they saw the multicoloured trees approaching with speed. They shook their bushy tops like a group of schoolgirl cheerleaders shaking pompoms for the final match. The boys always found the pompom girls wonderful to look at, but these multicoloured trees were absolutely heaven-sent. The trees couldn’t have cared less about the boys; their only concern was the fire which they had to extinguish at any cost. The first tree in line came marching towards Frank, stomping the ground with its heavy roots, causing the earth to tremble like a small earthquake.

‘Hurry up!’ Frank yelled in desperation. The fire was so hot that he was on the verge of having his trousers catching fire.

Suddenly four thick vines shot out from the forest and wrapped themselves neatly around the eager firefighting tree, dragging it off into the woods. Frank was horrified as he watched the fig tree being carted off into the forest. The forest was very angry about the fig tree protest and the killing of so many innocent Indian plants, and helping the boys was totally unacceptable.

The trees were very determined though and believed firmly in their cause. As a group of protestors they would do their absolute best to kill the fire.

Fortunately for Frank the sixth tree was successful at quenching the vicious blaze, before it got hauled off into the forest by the powerful vines. The wild tree stomped out the fire, brushing Frank slightly with its soft leaves, but causing him no harm.

Unfortunately for Philip, only the ninth tree succeeded in its attempt at extinguishing the fire. The poor boy nearly had heart failure as he watched all the precious fire stamping trees being hauled into the forest.

Philip and Frank relaxed their stiff legs and breathed a big sigh of relief as they watched a tiny vapour of smoke rise from the crushed pile of wood below. The wild fig trees had all been dragged off into the forest and there wasn’t a single one in sight. They must have received a suitable punishment for their unlawful protest. On the other hand, Frank and Philip could have kissed their trunks for saving their lives.

The boys swayed gently from their tree, taking several deep breaths of fresh air. They soon felt a lot better after their near asphyxiation, although the horror of the traumatic experience would not be quite so easily forgotten. They stared across at the squashed remains of the Indian plant tribe, longing to be on solid ground again, and free from the nasty piercing vines that bound them.

‘Can you hear me, Philip?!’ Frank screamed across the open field.

‘Yes, I can hear you, Frank! Are you okay?’ Philip replied, hearing his friend vaguely, now that all the tribal screaming had ceased.

‘I’m cool! Just these vines are really hurting me!’

‘What did you say?’ Philip asked, struggling to make sense of his friend’s screams.

‘The vines around my waist are hurting!!’ Frank shouted again.

‘Yes, so are mine! This is really frustrating!’

‘It is! But at least we weren’t roasted alive!’

‘Toasted the tribe! What?’ Philip screamed, not hearing his friend clearly.

‘We weren’t roasted alive!’ Frank shouted, raising his voice even more.

‘Yes! Thank goodness for that!’

‘What do you think these forest barbarians will do to us now?’

‘What?’

‘Never mind!’ Frank replied, frustrated with the broken telephone conversation.

Even though Philip hadn’t heard his friend, he was stressing about exactly the same thing. What were these evil plant beings going to do next?

‘Maybe by some miracle Chimzen will come and save us before it’s too late,’ Philip mumbled, clutching at his last straw of hope.

* * * * *

Philip opened his mouth to shout something to Frank and was stopped short by a sudden crashing sound. The wind blasted across the open field, scattering leaves and dead Indian plant petals in all directions. The crashing sound increased in volume, with the intensity of an earthbound thunderstorm. Philip closed his mouth, taking a big gulp, and almost swallowed his tongue in the process. Frank turned his head to look upwards, half expecting to see the sky light up with an electrical thunderstorm, followed by a tremendous cloudburst. That was not the case; there wasn’t a cloud in sight and the sky was crystal clear, filled with bright shining stars and a dazzling pale blue moon.

The overwhelming crashing noise was over in an instant and the gusting wind grew suddenly calm. Hundreds of strange plants, shrubs and small trees sprang out from along the forest edge, and dashed across the open green past Frank and Philip, as if in fear for their lives.

‘What on earth was that?’ Philip wondered, while he watched a group of about a hundred pink daffodils sprint across the open field. Frank was also quite taken by the enormous crash, but could not help laughing at the panic-stricken flowers.

‘Run, you bunch of depraved floral halfwits! Run!’ he roared, swinging in wild circles and chuckling to himself. He was making the most of the enjoyable moment; it really pleased him to see the other side half scared out of their petals for a change.

‘Yes, you twisted bunch of slithering delinquents! Now it’s your turn to run for a change, creepy green vipers!’ he yelled, watching several thick distressed creepers sliding hurriedly across the grass like a pile of twisting snakes in fear for their lives.

It had crossed Philip’s mind that Chimzen may have been responsible for all the mayhem, although he didn’t really believe that the wizard was capable of such

an act of power. If the boys had seen the destruction he had caused, they would have most probably fallen over backwards. When the great wizard had said he was more than capable of taking care of himself, he meant it!

Floran was in a state of chaos and all green life received warning by word of leaf. All the smaller trees and plants uprooted and headed for the hills, running for their lives to escape any further potential disaster. Large trees were unfortunately far too set in their roots to move, planted firmly, shaking at the leaves.

Floran had flourished in peace for centuries with no destruction of this magnitude ever occurring. The Floranion beings had had things far too easy up until now, growing deceitful to the roots, with their perfect rosy lives. No trees chopped down for paper, no suppliers of good fruit, no flowers used to manufacture perfume or medicine – this self-indulgent planet was up to no good.

Frank and Philip watched as the forest cleared its beds, having absolutely no idea what all the fuss was about. The boys were left completely undisturbed in all the hysteria, peacefully swaying from the trees while thousands of panic-stricken plants dashed past. Philip could feel the tree he was suspended from quivering slightly, and noticed several of its leaves being shaken to the ground as though autumn was suddenly upon it.

‘Please don’t get up and run tree! Please don’t run!’ Philip begged in fright, expecting it to uproot and take him for an unpleasant jog. The tree would have loved to do just that; it was absolutely petrified. Fortunately for him, it was far too deeply planted and could not budge a root.

In a very short space of time, all the smaller trees, shrubs, plants and creepers had evacuated the forest altogether, and only the very large trees remained.

The boys swayed gently from the trees, looking over the quiet desolate field, and wondering how on earth they were going to get down. If only they could at least spend some time talking with each other; they were both awfully lonely hanging up there all by themselves.

Chapter 17

‘**T**rio, we have to start searching for those boys as soon as possible! Goodness knows what may have happened to them by now!’ Chimzen exclaimed, looking up at the magical balls with a serious expression on his face.

‘Yes master, as soon as possible master!’ the Malcos agreed, spinning in anxious circles over his head. Zip was a bit delayed with her reactions and didn’t respond quite as swiftly as the others. She was overwhelmed with a burden of guilt, and was far too ashamed to admit to anything.

‘First things first though,’ Chimzen said, holding his wounded leg in agony. ‘Zip, I need you to give me some of that gentle lady healing touch of yours, if you don’t mind.’

Chimzen was playing the Malco girl to see her reaction. He noticed the little black spots spreading over her silver body like a deadly plague and it pained him to see her suffer so. All that was necessary was a simple confession to release herself from the impurity that bound her.

‘I can’t help you master,’ she squirmed, coasting a few steps back and dropping quietly to the ground.

‘What’s wrong Zip?’ Zen asked, dashing after her with an unusual display of concern.

‘Never mind Zen, come back here!’ Chimzen commanded.

Zen returned to his master’s side feeling very confused.

‘I want to clear up this silly matter once and for all,’ Chimzen addressed the trio. ‘Whose idea was it to search for me from an aerial view?’

Zet was about to pipe up on behalf of Zen, being the good spokesperson he was, when Zip suddenly flew up from where she lay and dropped in front of the wizard.

‘Sorry master! I lied to you!’ she cried, blushing red with embarrassment. ‘It was Zet!’

With those words an unpleasant blackness that smelled of death rose from Zip's silvery body and disappeared into the sunlight air. Zen and Zet watched in amazement, hardly believing their balls.

'What on earth was that?' Zen exclaimed.

'It was the...' Zip began.

'You don't need to say anything, my dear, you are forgiven,' Chimzen said.

'No, I must tell the others,' she insisted.

So Zip told the others about her little lie and apologised to Zen for taking the credit. Zen wasn't really bothered all that much, only sorry she had to learn such a nasty lesson. Chimzen explained the seriousness of a pure being opening up to deception and the consequences thereof. Zip was truly ashamed, and Chimzen felt confident that it would never happen again.

* * * * *

'Now that that's all out of the way, how about some of that gentle lady healing touch of yours, if you don't mind.'

'Of course master,' she said softly, still embarrassed and ashamed, but delighted to be chosen for the special task nonetheless.

'One small problem, sir, we are going to need some ash to seal the wound,' she squeaked, not thinking very clearly in her enthusiasm to proceed with the honourable task. Chimzen burst out laughing, stretching his hand across the endless field of ash.

'There's plenty here my dear!' he exclaimed, clutching his sides to contain the laughter.

'Yes master, of course master,' the little ball squeaked shyly, and dropped to the ground in embarrassment.

'Never mind Zip,' Zen said, feeling sorry for his sister. 'We all make mistakes, Malco girl.'

'Don't look so serious Zip, it's all forgotten,' Chimzen said, reaching over to grab a handful of plant ash. He gently rubbed the fine ash on his tender shins, sucking through his teeth in pain.

Once the wounds had been layered neatly with ash, he called on Zip to administer her healing laser magic touch. This time she would show the others exactly what a lady Malco ball was made of and that she was no fool.

The Malco doctor spun into action, hovering close to her master's wounded leg. She projected a very fine orange beam at one of the gaping sores, aiming with

perfect precision. The wizard braced his lips, clutching at his throbbing knee while the fine beam pricked at the sensitive wound.

Once proper contact had been made, the fine orange laser began with its accurate work of surgery. It felt like a series of soft pinpricks, not very painful at all. Zip rotated very slowly, cautiously running the fine beam along the edge of the perforated skin. The magical laser treatment combined with the plant ash forced the torn skin to rapidly regenerate new cells, and slowly narrowed the gaping wounds. Except for slightly reddish areas where new tissue had formed, in a very short space of time Chimzen's left shin was completely healed.

The right leg was slightly more complicated though, as the cactus leech had caused a nasty bruised area surrounding the wound, which made the leg rather sensitive to walk on. Once Zip had gently sealed the nasty sores with fine laser precision, she confidently spun near her master's face.

'Sorry master, this is really going to hurt. Are you ready?'

'No, not really Zip, you know how I feel about pain.'

'Come on master, you must be a man now,' she chirped cheekily, and returned to complete phase two of the delicate procedure.

'The cheek of it!' he exclaimed, shaking his head and smiling.

A bit reluctant, the little silver surgeon proceeded to treat the nasty bruise. Right now she wished one of the other Malcos would do it instead. The responsibility wasn't a very pleasant one at all.

The other two balls watched Zip, impressed with the neat work she had done so far. Once again, she projected a fine orange beam, aiming to the centre of the enormous bruise. Zip widened the scope of the beam into a large spread of fine lasers that encompassed the blackened area. The wizard held his breath, clutching his leg with a look of pain on his face. The lasers penetrated his skin like a sewing machine doing a zigzag stitch at high speed, in order to administer healing to the damaged flesh below. Zip worked with great care and accuracy, and completed the painful healing procedure in a very short space of time.

'That wasn't so bad now, was it master?' she asked, rubbing herself affectionately against his cheek, more relieved than he was that the procedure was over.

'I couldn't have done it better myself!' he exclaimed, jumping up and down to test his new legs. 'Thank you, my darling!'

Zip spun off totally beside herself. It always pleased her to have her master's approval.

'Good work Zip!' Zen yelled. It was quite strange to see Zen showing genuine approval for his sister's master work for a change. Maybe Zip's little "lying"

incident wasn't such a bad thing after all. It certainly seemed to be improving Zen and Zip's friendship, at least for the time being.

The two male balls congratulated their female friend, tapping into her from the sides. Zip was very pleased to see how impressed Zen was, although a bit taken aback with the sudden tap of friendship. She had felt so ashamed of herself earlier on, but now she was the little silver heroine.

* * * * *

Chimzen called for the trio's attention. They were having a little spinning game nearby.

'Yes master!' they squeaked simultaneously, spinning to a halt in front of him.

'Please won't the three of you form a nice seat for me, so I can have a few minutes' rest?' he asked, exhausted from a hard night's battle.

'Yes master!' they squeaked, quickly positioning themselves into a triangular formation. In a few seconds they had projected thick yellow beams towards each other, closed in to form a fairly small, hovering triangular seat.

The exhausted wizard plonked himself down on the little hovering seat, blasting the air out of his lungs as he relaxed his weary body. He sat quietly for a while, appreciating a few good minutes of rest to regain his strength. Thanks to Zip, his legs were as good as new, and now he could handle any challenges which lay ahead.

The sky was getting lighter and the stars were slowly fading away. The new day would shortly dawn, making it a lot easier for them to spot the boys. The wizard gazed quietly over the desolate stretch of gloomy ash black land, worried sick over his missing friends.

'Okay trio, let's not waste time; goodness knows where those boys have got to.' He stood to his feet and ordered them into hover board formation. They responded with a jerk, a bit startled by his sudden yell.

The trio spread further apart, increasing the size of the little hovering seat into the larger hoverboard formation and hung motionless slightly above the ground surface, eagerly waiting for the wizard to step on.

He mounted the solid yellow platform, and carefully positioned his feet for flight.

'I think we need to have a good aerial view of the forest, Malcos. It will give us a better idea of where the boys were taken. First take me back to the original enclosure, and we will take it from there.'

Without another word the trio platform gently rose into the air, flying straight up until they reached a reasonable height for the best possible aerial view of the underlying forests. Then they gradually increased their speed, and cruised towards the open field enclosure.

Chimzen looked over the edge, turning his head to see the extent of damage he had caused.

‘When will these creatures ever learn?’ He folded his arms and slowly shook his head. He was not happy with what he had been forced to do.

The Malco hoverboard cruised past several large stretches of trees and reached the destination in a very short space of time. Chimzen gazed down as they passed endless masses of trees, rather surprised by the enormous distance the nasty creepers had carried him across.

The sun could be seen slowly creeping up the horizon, transforming the dull sky to a pleasant blue. The trio hovered high above the large enclosure, where the enormous decaying parachute of lily plant lay shrivelled below.

Hovering at a standstill, he looked over the forest and noticed that only large trees remained. All the mobile trees and plants had completely disappeared, running for their leafy lives.

‘Well well, it looks like my little spout of anger last night has had quite an impact on these delinquent plant beings. I guess they will think twice before they decide to challenge me. Bunch of greenhouse gerbils.’

‘No one messes with Chimzen the Great!’ Zen squeaked triumphantly, adding his ten cents’ worth with intent to please his master.

‘Whatever you say, Zen,’ Chimzen rapped, sounding quite annoyed, while he scanned the forest below for any clues of the boys’ whereabouts.

‘Tell me, trio, do you balls have any idea where we were positioned last night when you were in the process of teleporting us back to earth?’

He looked over the rather similar surroundings and scratched his head in confusion.

‘Yes of course, master!’ Zen chirped excitedly, almost causing him to lose his balance. ‘It was by the blue earth ball!’

‘You are a genius Zen! Of course, the earth ball! Find it at once trio!’

The Malco board dropped gently, cruising to the exact position where the little earth planet lay. The wizard hopped off the yellow Malco platform, reached down to pick up the little blue earth ball, and placed it neatly in his pocket. He turned around, standing in the exact position he had been in the night before, looking very pleased to finally be making progress with his search.

‘There, that’s the tree I was hauled up by those nasty creepers!’ he exclaimed, striding towards the forest with his finger pointed upwards.

The trio quickly disengaged from their platform formation and hastily spun after the excited wizard.

He stopped suddenly before entering the forest, and eyed the thick grass below like a private investigator at the scene of the crime.

‘I know that the boys chased after me when I was dragged off, which means they must have also been apprehended somewhere nearby.’ He scratched his hairy chin in desperate hope of finding a clue somewhere. ‘Help me trio; search the nearby area for anything that will lead us in the right direction.’

‘Yes master!’ The trio spun off in different directions, searching the terrain eagerly for a clue.

Not even a minute had passed and Zet returned. ‘Master, I’ve found something! Come and look!’

The surprised wizard marched after the excited ball, eager to see what he had found.

‘Here master! Lying by the leaves!’ he exclaimed, bobbing up and down over his find.

Reaching over and rustling through a pile of dead leaves, Chimzen produced a small stick with a sharpened tip. The trio hovered above him, not understanding why their master looked so pale all of a sudden. The trees above shook their leaves in fear, protesting his antics during the night. He looked up at the raging trees momentarily, not demonstrating the least bit of concern, and returned his gaze to the sharpened little stick in disbelief.

‘No, not the Indian plant tribe!’

‘The Indian what?’ Zip squeaked, unable to make sense of her master’s mutterings.

Chimzen told the trio all about the Indian plant tribe, having had first-hand experience with them in a previous visit to Floran, and knowing all too well about their deadly misuse of fire.

‘So do you think the boys have been roasted alive by now master?’ Zip asked, feeling a bit uncomfortable about asking such a terrible question.

‘I can’t say for sure my dear, but that certainly seems to be the case,’ he replied, hanging his head in sorrow. ‘We don’t know that for sure though, so let’s give this search all we’ve got. I promised to return them home as schoolboys and not in ash jars from a cremation. No matter what it takes, we have to find them!’

‘Don’t worry master, they are alive and we will find them!’ they squeaked in

positive succession, sincerely hoping their statement was true.

Chimzen gazed into the forest, deep in thought. He ordered the trio to search for any clues, especially other fallen arrows, allowing them to clearly establish the direction in which the Indian plant tribe had taken the boys. The wizard searched carefully between the trees, scattering dead leaves in all directions, while the trio flew ahead scanning the ground surface at an incredible speed.

Shortly, two more of the sharp little arrows were found, as well as a loose little vine wreath used to gather the red petals of an Indian plant headdress. A clear pathway was established from the few fallen items and they hoped that the missing boys' whereabouts would be discovered at the end of the uncertain trail.

Chimzen walked to a large open space between the trees, with no nasty plants and creepers around to lash out and attack. The trees continued shaking their leaves in anger, unable to move a root. The wizard quite enjoyed the cool breeze they were generating during their temper tantrums and couldn't help smiling as he passed them by. The Malcos floated slightly above the uneven soil and quickly transformed back into a triangular hovering flying machine. Chimzen stepped into position and ordered the trio to fly over the forest, in the direction of the established Indian plant pathway. The Malco board rose eagerly up between the overhanging rustling branches and gently accelerated in the direction of the path of scattered clues.

The plant tribe had carried the boys off in a completely different direction to the one chosen for the wizard. The intelligent Floranion beings had done their absolute best to completely separate them, knowing how completely defenceless the boys were without the aid of their wizard friend, although none of the Floranion life ever expected him to escape and cause such terrible destruction.

'And away!' he roared, waving his staff above his head, with bright blue eyes flaring with determination.

The Malco board increased its speed, cruising past endless bushes of leaves, in perfect alignment with the path of recovered Indian plant possessions. Chimzen stood firmly on the solid level platform with his legs wide apart, the wind blasting through his wispy white hair and crispy beard. He gazed over the platform as he passed the trees, looking out in anticipation for the next open field.

'Slow down Malcos! Slow down!' he bellowed, reaching the end of the forest. Gradually the trio decreased their speed, cruising slowly over an open stretch of green. The hoverboard dropped lower and Chimzen scanned the area below. With high expectations, he squinted in all directions, but there was no sign of them anywhere.

'They must be further on, trio! Let's keep searching!'

The Malco board rose up into the air and continued across the next stretch of forest, flying accurately in a precise direction.

The sun had risen and it was a beautifully warm day, with a gentle breeze blowing across from the east and a few scattered clouds in the light blue sky.

They arrived at the next open stretch of green very soon and much to Chimzen's dismay there was still no sign of the boys.

'Maybe they weren't attacked by the Indian plants; maybe the little plants had dropped their arrows along the pathway some time back already,' he muttered, scratching his head with worry. 'Well, if they weren't captured by the Indian plants then at least they may still be alive, that would be a good thing.'

'Keep flying Malcos!' he yelled, not willing to give up hope, although he couldn't help but feel a little despondent.

Once again the Malco platform launched into the air and flew towards the next open area, arriving there shortly.

'What's that master?' Zen squeaked, hovering high above the open field.

'My goodness, Malcos! It looks like dozens of Indian plants basking in the sun! How very bizarre!' he exclaimed, peering over the platform in astonishment. 'Lower me down Malcos, so I can see what the blazes is going on!'

'Oh yuck! They're all dead, master!' Zip squeaked in disgust, hovering very near to the ground surface.

'They are indeed!'

* * * * *

He stepped off the Malco board to investigate the sticky masses of scattered Indian plant remains. 'It appears as though they were all crushed to death during some kind of stampede or something. How very strange.'

Not really all that concerned with the dead Indian plants, he raised his head to investigate the large open green. He scanned the field carefully, hoping by some small miracle to spot the boys somewhere, but unfortunately there was no sign of them anywhere.

The Malco trio disengaged, and hastily spun after their worried looking master. Chimzen had noticed a large burnt out fire to his left and was slowly heading towards it. He stood next to the large bed of ash and semi burnt chunks of wood, nervously poking at the burnt remains with his staff. His heart pounded rapidly as he fumbled between the charcoal remains, and a fresh layer of perspiration on his forehead glistened in the bright new day's sun.

After a few painful moments he turned to face the anxious trio and breathed a big sigh of relief. There was absolutely no trace of any scorched human remains in the fire, only piles of ash and burnt wood. Chimzen was greatly relieved and turned to investigate the scene further, followed by his faithful silver friends. He followed the trail of dead Indian plants to see if he could find any evidence that might possibly lead him to Frank and Philip's whereabouts.

Once he had reached the end of the scattered trail of death, he noticed another pile of burnt wood in the distance, lying scattered beneath a large overhanging branch. He paced forward nervously, yet eager to investigate the scene. Then suddenly he stopped dead in his tracks, noticing a thick length of vine dangling from the overhanging branch.

'Oh no, it can't be!' he cried, dropping to his knees, groping his wispy white hair in horror. 'I was too late; they're dead, and it's all my fault.'

The trio looked down at their distressed master, a little startled by his sudden outburst.

'Don't worry master, I'm sure they are both fine!' Zip squeaked, not believing anything she had just said, but still trying to comfort her master nonetheless. I must say, a dangling vine over a huge pile of burnt wood didn't leave a person with much hope now, did it?

Zen shot off to investigate the disturbing scene, not too keen on his sudden act of bravery.

'This really gives me the heebie-jeebies,' Zen squeaked to himself, rattling fearfully towards the dangling vine. After a minute or so of rolling in the ash and inspecting the scene, Zen returned to his unhappy master.

'Master, master!' he squeaked, hovering excitedly in front of him, completely black with ash.

'What is it Zen?'

'There's absolutely no sign of any burnt remains master! In fact, the vine isn't frayed either! Whoever was hanging there has been untied and released!'

The wizard stood to his feet, dusting the leaves from his robe. He looked very serious and somewhat distant.

'They may have escaped the fire, but they definitely haven't been untied and released,' he said, rubbing his cheek with an expression of worry. 'This planet hates me and they know very well that those boys are my only weakness. I think I know exactly who has captured them; I only hope that I'm wrong.'

In the meantime, Zet had been doing a bit of investigating of his own, flying around the open field to see what he could find.

‘Master, I found another dead fire on the other side of the field!’ he squeaked, bobbing back and forth in the direction.

‘Well of course, there must have been two fires!’ Chimzen exclaimed, squinting after the excited ball. ‘And I suppose whoever was hanging there was also untied?’

‘Yes master!’

‘Any sign of human remains?’

‘No master!’

‘That’s good to hear! So there’s a good chance they may both still be alive. Now all we need to do is find them.’

‘Well, well, well, out of the frying pan and into the fire.’

‘First things first though, didn’t you balls see any respectable looking blue plums lying around anywhere by any chance?’ he asked, noticing several pieces of half-eaten blue fruit spread out in all directions. ‘I’m absolutely starving! No use trying to find those boys feeling the way I do now.’

Zen shot off like a bullet towards the burnt out fire they had first stumbled across and bobbed excitedly over a large pile of untouched blue plums nearby.

‘Master! There are hundreds of fine looking untouched blue plums over here!’

‘Good show,’ he said, heading across the field towards the Indian plant chief’s stash of delightful fruit.

The ravenous wizard took a seat next to the large pile, and began eagerly stuffing several quality plums into his mouth. They were absolutely delicious, fruit fit for a king.

‘That was superb, now I’m absolutely stuffed,’ he said, after consuming one blue plum too many. He made an effort to stand up and promptly fell down again, holding his aching, bulging belly.

After a fair amount of huffing and puffing, the wizard forced himself back up on his feet, with the aid of his trusty staff. The trio had to keep their distance as he walked, so that he couldn’t overhear them laughing their balls off. Not only was his belly enormous, his lips were smudgy bright blue; it looked absolutely hilarious.

‘I must hurry now, I only wish I hadn’t eaten so much,’ he muttered, taking deep breaths to try and soothe his plum pregnant belly. ‘I just could not resist that blue fruit, it was quite simply irresistible.’

Looking rather uncomfortable, he staggered to an overhanging branch from which one of the boys had been hung, and leaned over to examine the ash below. After a few moments of holding his belly, he leaned right forward aided by his staff, and picked at something with his fingers.

‘Ah ha! I knew I would find this here!’ he triumphed, and carefully placed a

sample of ash into his pocket.

‘Do you think those plums have made him crazy?’ Zen whispered, wondering what his master was up to.

‘Sssh Zen! You’re mad!’ Zip squeaked, in an effort to stand up for Chimzen’s strange antics.

Then Chimzen walked slowly towards the edge of the forest, followed by the curious trio. When he reached the outer trees, he scattered the leaves to one side, exposing a patch of fertile soil below. The trees were shaking their leaves wildly, up in branches with the wizard’s threatening presence.

‘Malcos!’ he called, motioning the trio to hover in front. ‘Would you change the soil down here into a hard surface for me please?’

The confused trio immediately spun into action, without even questioning his strange request. They hovered over the cleared patch in a perfectly straight line. Then they each fired an extremely intense laser beam at the loose soil below, spreading the power flow outwards like a garden sprinkler to evenly distribute the heat. The trio rolled forward distributing an incredible amount of heat through the surface soil. In a very short space of time the surface was transformed into a solid smooth sheet of glass.

‘Ah, thank you Malcos, good job,’ Chimzen said, displaying a bright blue smile while painstakingly kneeling next to the sheet of freshly manufactured glass. ‘Don’t go away now, my silver friends, I’ll need your help again in a minute.’

‘Yes sir! We are right here sir!’ they squeaked in succession, eagerly hovering over their master’s head, curious to find out what he was up to.

He placed his hand into his pocket, fumbling between the seams with his fingers, gathering together some of the ash he had just collected, and placed it carefully on the smooth glass surface. Then he reached into his other pocket for something else.

‘No no, not the magic jumping ointment. I’ll blow the place up if I use that one,’ he mumbled, staring at the little bottle of red ointment he had mistakenly pulled out.

‘Ah, here we are, this is the one I was looking for,’ he muttered, holding a small bottle of blue liquid to the light and carefully examining it. ‘You just never know when you may need something like this.’

He spread the ash out into a circular formation with his already grubby index finger and carefully unscrewed the cap off the little bottle.

‘That’s what he’s doing! He’s making a sand disc, or should I say ash...’

Chimzen turned to face the alarmed ball with his index finger pressed firmly

to his blue lips.

‘Sssshhh!’ he rapped sharply, cutting Zip short while he held the steaming little bottle to one side. ‘I’m trying to concentrate here! Do you mind?’

Zip dropped to the ground behind her master, almost blushing with embarrassment. The wizard proceeded to pour a few drops of steaming liquid over the circular formation of ash and hastily replaced the cap while watching the bubbling mixture burst into flames.

Just as before, the sticky remains formed a solid disc. Only this time it wasn’t a green sand disc; instead it was a bright purple ash disc with exactly the same magical capabilities.

‘As simple as it is, I can never remember that blasted spell!’ Chimzen rapped in frustration, reaching into his pocket for his little book of magic. Flipping hurriedly through the pages with his black and blue fingers, he scanned through the little book and stopped near the middle somewhere. He then held the purple ash disc up on edge on the smooth glass surface, and made it spin like a coin while he chanted from his little black book:

*‘kurtle rataz geel das tortune,
Purple ash disc tell us your fortune.’*

The purple ash disc kept spinning faster and eventually looked like a solid bright purple ball. Chimzen summoned the trio to take their positions and they immediately responded, spreading themselves out in a neat triangular formation around the spinning disc. Zip was a bit reluctant to respond at first; still feeling a bit hurt by her master’s rude outburst. She realized the importance of the whole procedure and spun her silver butt into position. The Malcos projected bright colourful beams towards each other, then upwards to a point, forming a transparent pyramid scope for reality television. The purple disc started glowing brightly, projecting its story with clarity onto the pyramid walls of light.

The wizard anxiously held his hand up to his chin, unaware of the black ash he had smeared into his beard, and leaned over gazing through the Malco pyramid, almost too nervous to see what the ash disc would reveal.

‘Oh goodness no! Just as I suspected!’ he exclaimed, staring into the pyramid scope in horror, with blue plum lips, cheeks and nose smeared in black ash.

Chapter 18

Frank noticed two small creatures flying swiftly towards him across the open field, chattering softly to each other as they floated through the partial dawning light. A fine layer of dew had settled on his smelly creased school shirt and his short dark hair was wet, making him feel all sticky, damp and uncomfortable.

‘What the blazes is that?’ he muttered, not particularly in the mood for any more dangerous encounters. ‘Well, there’s not very much I can do right now, strung up here like a salami loaf.’

Violet Paulina was a sweet-scented African flower fairy that spoke with a rough Nigerian accent. She had a very light brown coloured complexion with a petite nose, large hazel fairy eyes and tiny leafy ears. She had several clusters of single purple violet flowers with rounded petals sprouting from her perfect little head in place of hair, and circular deep green velvety leaves flopping out at the sides. Her arms were long and graceful with perfectly formed hands, displaying tiny petite fingers with twiggy brown nails. Her legs were long and slender with dried leaves interwoven with thin vine to form a perfect pair of leafy shoes. Paulina had a large pair of flowery transparent purple fairy wings, which allowed her to fly with swiftness and accuracy. She was clothed with circular deep green velvety leaves sprouting from her chest and back, running in neat layers down to her waist. Pink and red violets sprouted below her waist, finishing her stunning appearance with a neatly arranged floral skirt.

‘Ah tink ah see him over dere mun, Lily Madonna ma sister. Is dat him, da ya tink?’ Violet asked in her stiff Nigerian accent, squinting her eyes through the mist to try and make something of the dark figure swaying in the distance.

‘It has to be my dear, it simply has to be!’ Lily replied in a distinct, pompous British accent. ‘They always tell us precisely where to find them, don’t they, Paulina dear?’

‘Af corse Madonna mun, af corse!’

Lily Madonna was just as striking as her sister fairy flower with the same petite delicate features, only she had a pale green complexion with a splendid array of neatly tied bowl-shaped trumpet lilies sprouting from her head in place of hair. Her eyes looked almost innocent, a stunning shade of intellectual radiant light blue. Her upper body was covered with a large round light green lily pad, sprouting from her tiny upper chest, and dropped down to form an elegant leafy canvas blouse, tied neatly at the waist with a small string of vine. A much larger white bowl-shaped trumpet lily surrounded her elegant shapely waist, covering her slender pale green legs in the form of a sleek silky trumpet lily skirt. Other than that, her tiny shoes were made of finely stitched lily leaves and her wings were a splendid spread of transparent beauty just like Paulina's, only pearl white in colour.

Violet Paulina and Lily Madonna hovered elegantly in front of Frank, hoping to surprise the boy nicely with their sweet innocent smiles and gentle approach.

'What do you want?' Frank barked, looking almost disgusted at the sight of the two floating beauties. 'Please don't say that you've come to set us alight again. For goodness sake, don't you guys ever give up?'

'Wat ya saying mun? we've come ta save ya, ma brother mun!' Paulina exclaimed, almost offended by Frank's rude attack.

'Why do you speak so funny, you sound like a drug dealer or something?'

'A'm frum Africa. A'm originated frum tha African violet mun!' Paulina exclaimed, starting to get a bit hot under the petals.

'How can you say you're from Africa, when you haven't been anywhere near earth before? You little violet prat!' he ranted in an angry sarcastic tone.

'Ag, never ya mind dat mun, it's a lung storay mun!' Paulina replied, feeling a strong burning resentment for the boy starting to tug at the pit of her tummy.

'I really don't care where you are from! Talking or not!' Frank snapped, shaking himself in frustration. 'You're on planet Floran now, and all of you creatures here are exactly the same, treacherous and evil!'

'How dare ya...!'

Lily Madonna quickly shoved her hand over Paulina's mouth, cutting short a vicious outburst of rage.

'Listen here, my dear fellow,' Madonna spoke in a very calm elegant tone. 'We are aware that you have had some very bad experiences on planet Floran, and I do apologize for that, but you must understand that we aren't all as evil as you say we are, my boy.'

'I'm not your boy!' Frank snapped, lashing his feet out in rage. 'As far as I'm concerned, you can all go to blazes, thank you very much.'

‘Okay, fine then! If that’s your attitude, we’ll just leave you here!’ Lily Madonna snapped, turning her back in disgust and slowly flying off across the open field. ‘Enjoy hanging there my boy; it’s going to be a long day in the blistering heat for you.’

Paulina was still hovering motionless in front of Frank with her dainty arms folded.

‘What do you want here, you flying African imbecile? Get lost!’ Frank yelled, showing bitter distrust towards any flower creature inhabiting that terrible place.

‘Ya do realize dat ya wizurd frend Chimzen sent us ta find ya? He had ta go back ta earth for an emerguncy mun!’ she explained, almost desperate to win Frank’s favour, yet hating the idea all the same. With that final statement, the anxious violet fairy turned up her delicate nose and flew after her flustered fairy friend.

Frank stared after the violet fairy in disbelief. A million and one thoughts rushed through his mind all at once. How did she know Chimzen? What if they really were his friends? Maybe he was being foolish to send them away? What if the Indian plant tribe came back?

‘Come back! Come back!’ Frank screamed, not wanting to miss his only possible chance of freedom. After all, what did the poor boy have to lose at this stage of the game?

Madonna and Paulina turned their heads to face Frank in his desperation, grinning wickedly from ear to ear.

‘Wait Paulina!’ Madonna cried, chuckling under her breath. ‘I think that aggressive bad-mannered excuse for an earthling needs to learn a little lesson, wouldn’t you say?’

‘Af corse Madonna, af corse,’ Paulina chuckled.

‘Please come back, please!’ he howled, thinking that it was already too late to make amends. The flower fairies kept their distance for a while, very pleased to hear Frank’s mournful cries. Then they slowly returned to his side, trying their best to look as serious as possible.

‘Ah thank you! Thank you, flower ladies!’ he exclaimed, panting with relief. ‘I thought you weren’t coming back!’

‘Well, we weren’t going to, my dear,’ Madonna said in a rather dignified manner, ‘but we did give Master Chimzen our word, so I guess we have to tolerate your pathetic schoolboy attitude.’

‘Look, I’m really sorry, but you must realize I’ve been through hell up here.’

‘Ya we do mun, that’s why we huv cum ta help ya, ma frend mun,’ Paulina said with sarcastic sincerity, winking deceitfully across to fairy Madonna.

‘How are you going to get me down from here?’ Frank asked, doubtful that the tiny one-foot tall beings had the strength in them to carry him.

‘Don’t you worry about that my dear boy; we will make sure that you are on solid ground in no time,’ Madonna stated confidently, carefully untying Frank’s hands with her surprisingly strong, delicate little fingers. ‘You just sit back and relax! A friend of Chimzen’s is a friend of ours!’

Frank felt a bit nervous, suspended so high up in the tree. He was beginning to feel unsure of whether the two fairies had the strength in them to handle such a weighty task. If they dropped him the poor boy would be dead meat.

The fairies massaged Frank’s ears with sweet words and he was finding it very easy to put his trust in them. After all, they were good friends of Chimzen; what more could he ask for?

‘Are you aware that my friend Philip is also hanging in a tree nearby, ladies?’ he asked.

‘Af corse mun, af corse! Our uder frends are taking care of him, don’t wurry mun!’ Paulina exclaimed reassuringly.

In a very short space of time Paulina and Madonna had untied Frank from the suspended vine and magically lowered him carefully to the ground.

‘Wow, that’s amazing!’ he cried. ‘How did you do that, with such tiny hands?’

‘Never underestimate the power of a woman, my dear,’ Madonna chuckled, always glad to receive a bit of flattery.

‘Ya cun call it flower power mun,’ Paulina chuckled, taking a seat on Frank’s shoulder and softly stroking his spiky hair. Frank was absolutely beside himself with the two flower fairies, enjoying every minute of their sweet-scented company. His body was feeling stiff and his back ached after a long night of swaying from the tree, and he felt quite soothed after doing a couple of boxing warm-up exercises.

‘I sure am glad to be back on solid ground again,’ he remarked, stretching towards the sky and blasting the air out of his lungs in relief.

* * * * *

Now Gallica was a Rose fairy, originally rooted in France. She had a very neat arrangement of red French roses sprouting from her head in place of hair, with dark oval leaves in between, leaving behind a powerfully captivating scent. Her complexion was pale white with the most incredibly alluring dark blue eyes, which almost seemed to reflect innocence.

Her upper garment was a collection of tiny oval dark green leaves, sprouting

neatly from the neck down to her waist, spread out over the arms, closely knitted to an end near her elbows, leaving her delicate back exposed. Her short dainty skirt comprised several layers of large pink and white petals sprouting from the waist. Her shoes were made from neatly woven dark oval rose leaves, and her large fairy wings were a transparent flowery light pink. In essence, she was a magnificently beautiful floral being.

‘What if ze wizard catches us in ze act, Azor, zen zwe will really be in ze trouble, won’t zwe?’ French Rose Gallica asked, flying anxiously towards Philip through the morning mist.

‘Don’t worry about it Gallica, he’s miles away from us,’ Jasmine Azor replied reassuringly, patting her fairy friend on the shoulder. ‘We’ll be long gone before Chimzen arrives; don’t you worry now!’

‘Oui, I hope so,’ Rose Gallica answered softly.

Rose Gallica was treacherous and deceitful just like her sister fairies, only she wasn’t quite as confidently wicked as Jasmine. She was far more sweet and seductive in her manner, luring victims with her pleasant charm and spellbinding beauty.

Jasmine Azor was a cunning flower fairy, the most deceitful of them all. She was considered the flower fairy ring leader, master of all treacherous schemes. She originally held a Greek accent, a foreigner just like the others, but decided to train her voice to speak a more ordinary English, just to stand out amongst the others. She had a light tan complexion, with slightly harder, more linear facial lines than her sister fairies possessed.

Sprouting from her head in place of hair was a neat arrangement of star-shaped white jasmine blossoms and tiny oval leaves, twisted into a neat floral bun, held in place with a couple of Indian plant arrows. She was clothed in an evergreen climber, sprouting from her right shoulder, spread out over her tiny chest in several closely intertwined floral lengths and wrapped neatly around her waist in a splendid sweetly-scented stylish jasmine blouse. Her skirt consisted of several large light green oval leaves, closely overlapped to form a short pressed leaf garment. Her little shoes were made from neatly stitched jasmine leaves.

Her eyes were an icy pale blue; making it difficult for her to project any kind of pleasant radiance with her wicked stare. Although incredibly beautiful and delightful to smell, Jasmine Azor was, quite simply, rotten to the roots.

Philip noticed the two figures slowly approaching from a fair way off.

‘And so the saga continues,’ he muttered, shaking the dew off his twisted mat of red hair. ‘I wonder what they’re up to? Can’t be much good I’m sure.’

He swayed from the tree feeling tired and frustrated, fed up with all the punishment this place had to offer. Rose Gallica and Jasmine Azor floated in front of the anxious schoolboy, staring and smiling sweetly. He hadn't bothered to even spare them a glance, cowering away with his head hung down, expecting a beating of some sort at any moment.

'Why do you look so sad young man?' Azor asked, using her sweetest possible tone. 'There's no need to look so glum, we're here to help you.'

Philip faced the two fairies, looking solemn, and a bit shaken by the unexpectedly pleasant introduction.

'Who are you?' he asked softly. Then his face lit up, delighted with the presence of the two hovering beauties.

'Zwe are ze flower fairies,' Gallica replied in a soft seductive tone, 'and zwe have come to save zyou, oui?'

He stared at the Rose fairy with his freckled mouth hanging wide open, completely in awe of her amazing beauty.

'Y-you, h-have?' Philip stammered in disbelief, spellbound by Gallica's incredible beauty. The Rose fairy returned his fixed stare with a sweet smile, flapping her eyelids and wings in innocent succession.

'Of course we have, young man!' Azor snapped, flying in front of Gallica with a stiff sarcastic smile, in an effort to steal attention for the sake of vanity. 'We are not all evil creatures here on planet Floran, believe it or not.'

His transfixed gaze snapped back to the surroundings, realizing the reality of his situation. There was something about that Jasmine fairy that he didn't quite trust, something about those cold blue eyes.

'Of course not,' he answered after a lengthy pause, trying his best to look convinced.

'Zwe will unztie zyou, oui?' Gallica asked, gently stroking the boy's head with her tiny hand, captivating him once again, this time with her amazing rosy scent.

'Okay,' he replied, as if asked by the school beauty to accept a kiss from her for the first time. Not that there ever was a first time.

The two flower fairies carefully untied the boy and gently lowered him to the ground, much to his amazement.

'How did you do that?' he gasped, struggling to regain his balance after the long period suspended from the tree.

'Never underestimate the strength of a beautiful lady my boy, never underestimate it!' Azor cackled, grabbing him by the shoulders to prevent him from falling over, in a forced attempt to show concern. Gallica clutched on to Azor's

shoulder, forcing her out of Philip's hearing range.

'Azor, zyou must be more gentle zwith zhim,' she whispered into Azor's leafy ear. 'Please zshow zhim some respect, or zhe will run zaway, oui?'

'I know that, flower child, how dare you order me around!' she barked, forcing the French flower fairy to back off in fear. 'I will try, but I hate them, I hate them, I hate human beings!'

Philip looked on from a distance while the two flower fairies squabbled, straining his ears to try and make sense of the heated conversation. His back was aching from the ropes and his whole body was feeling unpleasantly stiff. He felt uneasy about the situation, but decided rather to keep quiet for now. He was far too tired for any confrontation at this stage of the game.

By now the mist was clearing and the golden rays of sunlight shone across the clear blue sky.

'Where's Frank?' Philip asked, walking across the open field.

'Your friend, of course, you will see him now,' Azor said, applying all her effort to come across as someone pleasant.

Gallica fluttered at Philip's shoulder, running her tiny fingers through his sticky matted thatch of ginger hair, and giggled softly to herself. He looked up at her splendid head of roses, smiling from ear to ear. The girls at school treated Philip like the plague, not even sparing him a glance. Gallica on the other hand had lots of time for him and even though she was tiny, her beauty far outshone any of the classroom treasures at his school. He was feeling a lot more at ease now with the presence of the rose fairy. Azor decided to keep her distance though; it would be far safer that way as she struggled to disguise her bitter hatred towards him.

'Frank! Is that you?' Philip yelled, noticing a tall figure outlined in the distance.

'Philip!' Frank answered, jogging towards his beloved friend in delight. The boys embraced each other tightly, both filled with immense relief.

'I didn't think I would ever see you again Frank. Boy, am I glad to see you're okay!'

'Tell me about it! Did you see those flames? We nearly got cremated!'

'Phew, that was a close shave!'

'You're alive my friend, you're alive!' Frank roared, grabbing his friend by the shoulders and dancing a jig, overwhelmed with relief.

'You can say that again – we're alive!'

The four flower fairies hovered above the excited boys, laughing and screaming in their deceit.

'Philip, I want you to meet Violet Paulina and Lily Madonna, my saving

angels!’ Frank exclaimed, motioning towards the two radiant flower fairies with boasting pride. ‘Aren’t they absolutely priceless?’

‘Of course, Frank, of course,’ Philip replied, almost nervous to say so.

‘I see you also have a couple of flowery heroines!’

‘Yes, well um, this is...uh,’ Philip answered, pointing awkwardly to the two fairies.

‘I zam Rose Gallica and zis is Jasmine Azor,’ Gallica responded sweetly, after a prolonged pause, noticing that the poor boy had no idea what their names were.

‘They say that they are friends of Chimzen, Philip!’ Frank exclaimed confidently, ‘which means we will be going home soon!’

‘They are?’ Philip responded in disbelief.

‘Yes of course, didn’t your fairy er...’

‘Rose Gallica,’ the rose fairy chirped.

‘Yes, didn’t Rose Gallica tell you?’

‘Well no, not actually.’

‘Yes it is the truth, my dear,’ Madonna interrupted in her smooth English voice, ‘the good wizard has been friends with us for years, and it is our duty to take you boys to a place of safety to await his return. If we weren’t friends with him my dear, then how could we ever know his name?’

‘I dunno,’ Philip mumbled, not at all convinced.

‘Don’t look so worried, you will be safe with us, my boy.’

Philip watched Frank’s growing excitement, not feeling quite as confident as he looked. He was a bit overwhelmed with his friend’s positive response, expecting him to be the one that would respond negatively towards them. Frank was in a trance, absolutely spellbound by the flowery beauties. Philip couldn’t say what was wrong; he just had an unpleasant feeling about them all of a sudden, churning at the base of his tummy. Maybe he was just being paranoid because of all the other nasty things that had happened to them on Floran.

‘Okay,’ Philip said, lifting his hands in surrender, ‘so where are we going, then?’

‘Well ya have ta just follow us; we will take ya ta a place af safety mun,’ Paulina said, motioning the boys to follow after her attractive violet scent.

‘She’s a beauty Philip, what do you say?’ Frank whispered; walking ahead with a naughty smile plastered on his face.

‘Yeah Frank, whatever,’ Philip muttered, lacking the certainty his friend possessed.

Gallica and Azor flew behind them, spying on their general behaviour. They

had to make the journey as smooth and as comfortable for the boys as possible, if they were to have their way. Noticing Philip's tension, Gallica rested herself neatly on his right shoulder and brushed herself almost seductively against the side of his face, with her sleek dark green tiny oval leaf garment massaging his sticky ear lobe. She cunningly whispered sweet nothings into his ear in an effort to soothe his tension. It worked like a charm; he calmed himself after a short while, chuckling at Frank in an effort to brag. Frank was always the one that received all the attention from the girls, being the school boxing champion; now it was his turn to gloat.

Frank watched Philip giggling and chatting to the stunning flower fairy and couldn't help feeling a bit neglected. Then much to his delight, Lily Madonna placed her petite lily butt on his shoulder and chatted sweetly into his grubby ear. She had noticed his look of disappointment, and decided that it would be best to keep the vibe as pleasant as possible. So all was fair and well.

'Zwe will prepare zyou ze nice food, zyou will have ze nice bath and ze nice zsleep, oui?' Gallica whispered to Philip, pampering his sweaty ear lobe with kindness, enticing him to remain in a neutral frame of mind.

The party walked through a peaceful forest, with no sign of plants, shrubs and creepers, only firmly planted trees shaking up an angry storm of leaves.

'Do you have any idea what happened last night to cause all the plants to just disappear like that?' Philip asked Gallica out of the blue. Caught off guard, the rose fairy started blushing. Her complexion turned from fair to a bright red that almost matched the colour of her rosy head arrangement.

'Oui, er...' she answered, struggling for words. Azor appeared in front of Philip like greased lightning, and stared him up and down with frosty blue eyes of death.

'It was a meteorite!' she snapped, addressing his question as an insult. 'Many of my kind have been killed because of last night's disaster. It is an extremely sensitive issue for us, and I would really appreciate it if you kept your trap shut about it.'

'Yes mam,' Philip answered, almost falling over backwards in fright. 'I'm really sorry, mam, I didn't know...'

'That's enough!' Azor barked, fluttering away with an open demonstration of disgust. 'Zip it!'

The boys continued as if nothing had happened. Philip knew something was strangely wrong with these flower creatures. Frank on the other hand chose to see it, quite understandably, as a sensitive issue for them. After all, anyone back home would be devastated if thousands of people were killed by an exploding meteorite.

* * * * *

After a fair amount of walking, a few forests later, the group reached a large valley with a broad river flowing peacefully through its middle. There were a few scattered colourful trees swaying calmly, spread out in all directions, and several clusters of large shapely boulders. Other than that, the valley was all open land, with large random spreads of long green grass. The descent to the valley floor was very gradual and the boys proceeded carefully down the rocky slope. The four little winged ladies drifted ahead, chatting softly amongst themselves, satisfied with the two boys' pleasant attitude towards the journey ahead. They were coasting quite far up front by now, carefully guiding the boys over rocks and other dangerous obstacles along the path.

Azor was growing extremely impatient with their snail pace stroll and was seriously contemplating abandoning them. She was a selfish independent, and patience was not one of her strong points. Philip felt a creepy sense of doubt erecting the hairs on the back of his head; something just didn't feel right.

'Frank!' Philip whispered loudly, stepping carefully between two large rocks. Perspiration poured off his face while he checked to see if any of the fairies were in hearing range.

'Yes, what's up?'

'I don't trust these fairies, what do you think?'

'Come on, Philip, don't be so negative; they're here to help us.'

'Don't speak so loudly, they might hear us.'

'So what if they do?'

'Shhh!' Philip exclaimed, desperate not to be heard.

'Philip, I think you watch too many movies.'

'Didn't you get upset when they tried to save you?'

'Of course I did, I made a stink.'

'What did they say to make you trust them like this?'

'They said that they know Chimzen, and that he had to go back home for an emergency.'

'And you believe that?'

'Why wouldn't I?' Frank exclaimed loudly, exasperated with all the questions. The flower fairies began to notice all the arguing and turned to face the boys.

'What's the problem, boys?' Azor snapped impatiently. 'Are you going to stop arguing and hurry up? Or do you want to stay here and starve to death?'

'Er yes mam, sorry mam,' Frank muttered, shocked by her sudden outburst.

‘Zwhy do zyou zshout at zhim like that Azor? Do zyou zwant to blow our cover, oui?’ Gallica whispered loudly, forcing Azor backwards by the shoulder.

‘Listen Gallica, this is not a crèche and I won’t tolerate a bunch of delinquent misfits that can’t behave properly! If they...’

Paulina shoved her hands over Azor’s face to cut short the flow of poisonous speech.

‘Shush mun shush!’ Paulina snapped, looking back and smiling sweetly at the two surprised boys.

Azor floated in a huff with crossed arms, trying her best not to let her temper manifest its deadly poison again. Gallica floated innocently towards the boys in an attempt to win their favour with her sweet-scented head of blooming roses and her soft seductive tongue.

‘Zso sorry boys, zshe does tend to fly off ze handle every znow and zen,’ she said, stroking their cheeks softly, attempting a cute smile with great difficulty.

‘Er well,’ Philip said shyly.

‘Zshe like zis with everyone, don’t zworry! Zshes very hard to live wiz, but zshe does try, zyou know. The zing is zshe has a zvery good heart zyou know; please zbe patient my friendz, oui?’

Frank and Philip nodded in return. What choice did they have anyway? Even if there was a doubt in their minds, they had come so far already. They were absolutely starved by now and the thirst was unbearable. They were very near the river; if anything they had to have some water. If they ran away now they would most probably dehydrate, and who knows what these fairy creatures were capable of.

‘Zwe will eat zsoon my frendz, don’t zworry, zwe will eat zsoon, oui?’ Gallica said, stroking them softly on the head, knowing exactly which buttons to push to maintain their approval. The truth of the situation is that the flower fairies had marvellous magical abilities and could have whipped them up a hot steamy meal of roast beef and potatoes if they had wanted to. The promise of food was the key instrument in keeping their interest though, and starving them for a while only pleased the wicked flower fairies all the more.

‘Chimzen would never leave us here Frank. Think about it; he would never go home without us for other business or whatever,’ Philip whispered, watching Rose Gallica fly after Azor to ensure that she was calm.

‘I don’t know what to say, Philip, I don’t know,’ Frank muttered, kicking a pile of stones in the air. He was beginning to feel uncomfortable about his hasty decision to follow the fairies. ‘He left us hanging in the trees to burn to death, didn’t he?’

‘He must have been in danger himself, Frank. Look, he changed us back to people again, didn’t he?’

‘I don’t know what to believe; all I know is that I’m tired and hungry right now,’ Frank replied wearily, spraying dozens of pebbles into the air with the tip of his shoe.

‘Azor is definitely evil Frank, and I can’t see Chimzen being friends with someone like her.’

‘Just leave it Philip, just leave it,’ Frank moaned, sucking the roof of his mouth that was dry from thirst. ‘Let’s get something to eat and drink first, before we fall over and die.’

The exhausted boys followed after the flower fairies in silence; their parched tongues hung to the ground in desperation for a drink of water. After a short while Frank noticed the bright morning sunlight reflect off the river in the near distance.

‘Water, Philip! Water!’ he yelled, his eyes bulging out on stalks in delight while he sprinted towards the gently flowing river. Philip raised his sweaty chin from his chest, looking ahead in excitement, and dashed eagerly after Frank.

‘Wait for me, Frank! Wait for me!’ he yelled, ready to gulp the refreshing water down by the gallon.

The flower fairies hovered cross-armed, looking with wicked smirks on their faces.

‘Watch this ladies,’ Azor said with a slanted smile, waving her petite little fairy finger in a circular motion towards Philip, and muttering something sinister under her breath. The other three fairies watched on in delight as Philip tripped and launched mysteriously forward in full flight. The poor boy plummeted to the ground like a bag of cement. As if he had just tripped over a rock or something, he hastily stretched out his hands to prevent a nasty fall.

‘Ouch!’ he yelled, shredding the skin off his palms and tearing a large hole in his school shirt. He grazed himself above his ribs and the shredded surface wound stung like hell-fire. Frank slid to a halt and turned to see what had happened to his friend.

‘What’s wrong Philip?’ he yelled, panting like a St. Bernard on a hot summer’s day as he walked back. ‘How did you fall?’

‘I don’t know; I didn’t see anything.’ He sounded dazed, holding his palms together with a look of anguish on his face.

Frank knelt next to him, and placed his hand gently on his shoulder, trying his best to comfort him in his pain. Being a good boxer, Frank was an expert when it came to pain management and would have more than gladly taken his friend’s

cuts and bruises upon himself, if that were at all possible. He glanced across at the flower fairies, and to his horror, he noticed them smiling and sniggering amongst themselves.

Rose Gallica realized Frank had spotted them chuckling in amusement, and cautiously flew across to him, forcing her facial features into an expression of concern.

‘I don’t understand it Frank, I mean, I just fell over for no reason at all,’ Philip whined, looking miserable and confused.

‘Are zyou alright zyoung man?’ Gallica asked, pampering his bleeding palms with her tiny hands, trying her best to look sympathetic.

Frank looked on in anger, unsure of how to deal with the situation. If these flower fairies had magical powers, what chance did he and Philip have of trying to defend themselves? How would it help to lose his cool? Frank shook his head, in the realization that all his friend’s paranoia was a reality, and that nothing on the planet was up to any good.

‘Come on, let’s go!’ Frank demanded, brutally grabbing Philip by the arm and dragging him off to the river. Gallica hovered behind, with no reply to her feeble concern. Philip followed behind, a bit shaken and alarmed by Frank’s hasty reaction.

‘What’s wrong, Frank?’ he asked, a bit pale in the cheeks.

‘You didn’t trip Philip,’ Frank replied abruptly.

‘What do you mean, I didn’t trip?’

‘You were right; those flower children are as wicked as sin.’

‘Why do you say that all of a sudden?’

‘Cause they were laughing their asses off when you fell, and I’m positive that one of them made you fall.’

‘Oh, okay,’ Philip answered, too shaken to ask any more questions.

The boys arrived at the riverbank, and looked down at the gently flowing water for a moment. It was amazing; the water was crystal clear and pure, unlike the polluted, murky rivers back home. The water ran deep, with a soft green moss type substance spread over its bed and rocks below in thick layers. There were no fish to be seen anywhere, of course, or any other form of river bed life, other than plenty of thick green layers of slime.

‘What are you waiting for Philip?’ Frank asked, watching him stare into the bottomless pool, while he knelt down and dipped his face into the precious water.

The boys drank endless gulps of life sustaining liquid to quench their desperate thirst with water, which they had taken completely for granted back home. It was

cool, slightly sweet and pleasantly refreshing.

‘That was the best water I’ve ever had in my whole life!’ Philip exclaimed, grinning from ear to ear. He soaked his throbbing palms in the water’s soothing coolness, and splashed his grazed side in relief.

‘Fan-blimming-tastic!’ Frank cried with satisfaction, wiping his dripping face on his grubby sleeve.

‘Let’s go for a swim Philip, what d’you say?’ he suggested, sticking his nose down his smelly shirt in disgust.

‘Good idea Frank.’ He hastily stripped off his clothes, without giving it a second thought.

They splashed and screamed excitedly in the cool water, wearing nothing but underwear. It felt amazingly refreshing after the last days’ events.

* * * * *

The flower fairies seated themselves on a large boulder, close to the riverbank, and spouted ladylike commentary.

‘Don’t zyou zink zey look rather cute in zose little jocks, oui?’ Gallica chirped, watching the boys splash about with a naughty smile on her face.

‘They are just kids! Whut are ya saying, Gallica mun?’ Paulina snapped.

‘Oui, I know zat Paulina, but zat boy zwith ze black hair is kindza cute.’

‘All I know is dat dey stink; it wus unbearable mun. A buth is exactly whut dey be needing, if ya know whut a be saying, mun.’

‘I agree my dear, those boys smelt absolutely appalling,’ Lilly Madonna added, turning her snooty little nose up away from the river. ‘A good scrubbing behind the trophy handles never did anyone any harm.’

‘Ya, dose boys be reminding me af dem sweaty bluck Nigerians buck home; dey always be stinking frum dat fierce sun in Ufrica. Dey only be huving da bath maybe wunce a munt, mun.’

‘That’s enough Paulina,’ Azor barked, poking the Violet fairy fiercely on the side of the face with her twiggy little fingernail. ‘You’ve never even been to earth before, what’s all this nonsense about Africa? Flower child!’

‘I’ll stab ya in da buck just like da Nigerians do! Ya smully Jasmun turd! Mun!’ Paulina snapped, gazing back at Azor with hate.

‘Just you try, you Nigerian reject...!’

‘That will be enough, my dears,’ Madonna interrupted assertively, shoving her delicate little hand over Azor’s poisonous mouth. ‘Please stay focused on the boys,

ladies, I am positively sure that the fun will commence at any moment.'

'Help! Help!' Frank screamed, feeling something slimy tightly wrap itself around his left ankle.

'What on earth is wrong with you Frank? Are you acting?' Philip asked in surprise. He was not in the mood for Frank's idea of a game right now.

'No Philip! Something is tugging at my ankle and it's pulling me down!' he gurgled, gasping for his last breath of air.

'Let me help you Frank!' Philip exclaimed, thinking Frank must have caught his leg on something.

'Hurry, Ph- Hur...!'

Philip's heart jumped in fright while he watched his friend disappear below the surface. Surely this couldn't be happening; hadn't they both been through enough already?

He took a deep breath, filling his lungs with as much valuable air as they would allow, and speedily dived below the surface, in an attempt to free Frank's ankle from whatever it was that bound it.

The flower fairies shot off eagerly towards the river for a closer view of the drowning action.

'Those boys are fools!' Azor cackled, watching them disappear into a whirlpool of bubbles. 'Surely they would know better than to chance any potential aqua plant life on this planet?'

'Maybe they would have, if we had advised them better, my dear,' Madonna chirped, smiling wickedly from ear to ear.

'Ya, never trust anything on dis planut, mun, never trust anything,' Paulina whispered, turning her Violet head arrangement from left to right slowly with a look of mystery.

You see: the flower fairies had deceitfully neglected to inform the boys that the green moss infesting the river bed was by no means moss. The moss like plant was in fact an ancient river dweller, known as the Goza riverweed, responsible for the termination of every single living organism inhabiting rivers, dams, lakes and estuaries on planet Floran. The Goza weed was a large moss green, carrot-shaped river bed scrounger, with the same conical rough structure, only not quite so crunchy, and definitely no good for your eyesight. The carrot weed had several long seaweed looking, moss green strands which extended peacefully from its conical body, primarily used for smothering its victim. Human beings were a far easier target, held beneath the water by several of the binding extensions, and drowned in a matter of minutes. Humans were quite obviously rarely ever seen on modern

Floran, so they were left to feed on dead leaves and grass instead. Once the prey had been killed, a thick mosquito like probe, situated at the hindquarters, would inject its victim with a deadly dissolving fluid, enabling the weed to break its prey down into small manageable pieces, for easy digestion through an orifice situated at its front end. Frank and Philip were unaware that they were swimming directly over several deadly Gozas, and it had been quite some time back since the nasty river muncher had last feasted on tasty schoolboy.

Philip groped about at Frank's leg; in an effort to take hold of the foreign obstacle that was dragging him under. Frank fumbled at his ankle, applying his boxing brute force to detach the foreign leafy strands of weed. The boys tugged frantically at the determined Goza extensions, both of them already starting to feel a desperate burn in the chest for want of precious oxygen. Frank was unable to free himself and started to panic, causing his remaining air supply to deplete rapidly. The determined Goza plant held on for all its worth, blocking the flow of blood to his completely numb foot. 'Ah, at last,' Philip thought, managing to finally loose the nasty weed from his friend's leg. The boys launched themselves to the surface, taking in desperate gulps of air.

The flower fairies were chuckling amongst themselves, watching the drowning experience as if it were a live action show on reality television, short of popcorn and cool drink. All four jolted back in fright; the last thing they had expected to see were the two boys surfacing. Fortunately for the flower fairies, they weren't even noticed; Frank and Philip were far too preoccupied with breathing and gaining their senses back.

Unfortunately for the boys, they had disturbed an entire nest of nasty Goza weeds, which now launched to the surface in force.

'Frank! Can you feel that, Frank?' Philip screamed, while dozens of Gozas wrapped their eager leafy tentacles around his legs. 'Frank!'

But Frank was nowhere to be seen; he had disappeared below the surface once again. Not even a second later, Philip disappeared in a whirl of wild bubbles.

'There they go again!' Azor cheered, edging forward for a better view, amused by their sudden disappearance.

'Marko!' Madonna cried, sniggering in mockery.

'Polo!' Azor cackled in wicked delight.

This time it was impossible; Frank was strapped firmly on both arms and legs, and completely smothered and inundated by several Goza monster slimy strands. Philip was in the same predicament, dragged down mercilessly to the river bed. The more the panic-stricken boys struggled, the tighter the Gozas strapped on.

‘Don’t zyou zink zwe should zsave zem znow Azor? Zey are going to drown, oui?’ Gallica asked, displaying an ounce of almost genuine concern.

‘Just a little longer,’ Azor replied, curiously peering through the water with wicked content. ‘Naughty schoolboys need to learn a lesson or two, don’t you think?’

‘They are going to die my dear, we must save them,’ Madonna insisted, with a touch of urgency in her voice. ‘We still have a use for them, remember?’

‘Okay, if we must,’ Azor sighed, folding her arms in disappointment.

The four fairies shot through the water hurtling down towards the river bed. Gallica and Azor grabbed Philip by his arms, one on either side, and yanked him forcefully to the surface. Philip was already starting to lose consciousness and wasn’t really aware of what was happening. The flower fairies were seen as gods on planet Floran, and once the Goza weeds were aware of their presence, they fearfully released the boys in haste. Madonna and Paulina hauled Frank out of the water in seconds, with a magical display of strength.

The boys sat on the opposite side of the riverbank, coughing and spluttering their lungs out. Both of them were feeling dizzy from their near drowning experience, as if trapped in a bad dream. After a short period of desperate breathing and calming themselves, the boys felt less lightheaded and their pale complexions returned to normal. Frank looked to his right and noticed Gallica standing quietly beside him, staring with forced concern.

Immediately he realized that he was sitting in his underpants, and hastily pulled his legs inwards, blushing with embarrassment. Gallica giggled sweetly, amused by the boy’s flushed red cheeks.

‘Wh-where are my clothes?’ Frank stammered shyly.

‘Oh zyour clothes, zey are over zere on ze other zide, oui?’ Gallica said with a chuckle, pointing to the other side of the riverbank. ‘Let me fetch zem for zyou, oui?’

‘P-Please,’ Frank answered, clutching at his legs nervously. The four fairies zipped across to the other side of the river and gathered the boys’ clothes and shoes together, and handed their belongings to them.

‘Ag, this stuff stinks!’ Azor complained, holding the sweaty garments at arm’s length from her sensitive fairy snout.

The boys grabbed at their grubby school outfits and placed them on in a hurry. The amused flower fairies watched intently while the boys quickly dressed themselves.

‘Do you mind?’ Frank snapped, forcing both legs into the same trouser leg in

a frustrated hurry.

‘Actually, we don’t mind at all young man,’ Lily Madonna replied, smiling sweetly and turning to face the other way. ‘We don’t mind at all my boy; I must say, you put on a most delightful show.’

‘Very funny!’ Frank barked.

‘There, none of us are looking now,’ Azor chirped, bobbing beside the other fairies, amused by Frank’s over sensitive behaviour.

He muttered to himself in anger while fitting a smelly sock.

‘It won’t help you to get upset Frank, we’re both screwed,’ Philip sighed, his hands trembling while he buttoned his shredded bloodstained school shirt.

‘Those flippin Floran flower fairies can go to blazes as far as I’m concerned!’

‘You’ve seen their strength Frank; what chance do we have of survival, getting on the wrong side of them?’

‘I don’t know! I don’t care either! I’ve had enough!’

‘Calm down! For goodness sake, calm down!’

‘They knew about those water creatures, I know they did! And what’s more they just left us to drown!’

‘I guess so.’

‘To make matters worse, they’ve dumped us on the other side of the river, so we can’t even try and escape, unless we want to be river monster’s lunch.’

Frank sprang to his feet and marched towards the group of giggling fairy beasts.

‘Why did you take so long to save us?’ Frank roared, his eyes demanding an immediate answer.

The four fairies choked on their wicked scheming, and turned to face the raging schoolboy in surprise.

‘Take so lung? whut ya mean, mun?’ Paulina questioned his sudden outburst, flying straight towards him with a demanding glare.

‘Y-yes, why did you take so long to save us?’ he repeated, stammering with uncontrolled rage.

‘Wut are ya saying mun?’ Paulina replied, looking shocked. ‘We neva saw ya drownen in da furst place. Wat sort of monsters da ya take us fur, mun?’

‘You are evil just like everything else on this treacherous planet!’ Frank screamed, stamping his foot in anger.

‘Calm down Frank!’ Philip exclaimed, trying his best to shake him back to his senses. Azor swiftly flew forward, her pale icy blue eyes glaring daggers at Frank.

‘If this is the kind of thanks we are going to get for saving your lives, then the pair of you can rot on this planet with no protection at all.’

With those final words soaked in poisonous hate, Azor beckoned her sister fairies to follow, and all four flew off with folded arms and smug faces.

Frank was already familiar with this kind of psychological behaviour and despised them all the more for it, throwing resentful schoolboy insults after them in rage.

Philip looked around, knowing all too well that they were between a rock and a hard place, trapped on the wrong side of that dreaded river with no place to run to.

‘What are we going to do now Frank, there’s no place to go?’ he moaned, looking mournfully over the quiet valley. ‘And I’m absolutely starved.’

‘I dunno, but I won’t tolerate their nonsense any longer; I’ve had enough of those fairy goons.’

‘What choice do we have Frank, unless you want to starve to death?’

They watched the flower fairies fly off into the distance, and were starting to feel overwhelmed by the wicked chill that possessed the valley. The deceitful fairies offered the two a strange sense of comfort, not something that could easily be described, something strangely captivating and alluring.

‘Okay Philip, they win; you can call them if you want,’ Frank said, breathing a heavy sigh. He was feeling quite uncomfortable at the thought of having to face them again, but what choice did they have? Philip yelled after them, literally begging for help.

‘These earthlings are so foolish my dears,’ Madonna spouted, ignoring the teenage whine. ‘They are always so plagued by their consciences. I’m so glad we don’t have one of those, whatever it may be.’

The four turned to face Philip’s mournful whimpering, grinning from ear to ear.

‘Oui, zey have taken ze bait, let’s go and fetch zem,’ Gallica said, quite enjoying the game.

‘As long as we make them feel bad first, exploit their soft earthling hearts, if you know what I mean?’ Azor cackled, raising a fairy eyebrow.

The fairies returned with arms folded, looking deeply upset. They had to be given credit for their superb lying ability; they were absolute masters at it. Much against his better judgement, Frank played along with the reprimand he received from Azor.

The boys were absolutely starving, and thoughts of the delicious pinana enjoyed the day before only increased their hunger pains. They were so hungry by then that they were even prepared to risk their lives for a good meal.

They followed after the now friendly flower fairies, who promised them special treats once they arrived at their not too far off home.

‘Here we are, my boys, here we are then!’ Madonna announced, gesturing towards the leafy abode in high-pitched delight. The fairy home was positioned in a large recess on the upper slant of the plush green valley, consisting of several gigantic fern type leaves sprouting inwards on either side, encompassing the ditch to form cool shady enclosed housing, which allowed partial light to flow through its leafy roof.

The flower fairies hovered excitedly in front of the large wax green leaf entrance, spreading it aside for the anxious boys to pass through. Philip hastily removed his crumpled yellow and black striped school tie from his pocket and tossed it to the side of the floral abode unnoticed. If Chimzen by some chance flew past on the Malco board, he would have to be left with some clue or other of their exact whereabouts.

* * * * *

‘Cum in boys, mun, cum in.’ Paulina welcomed the boys, sounding slightly over enthusiastic. Frank and Philip stepped cautiously into the tranquil dwelling. It was evenly set with bands of gigantic ferns that reflected spellbinding rays of luminous green light, and was structured in an “L” bend with a large boulder positioned on the left side at the turning point.

‘Wow!’ the boys exclaimed in chorus, amazed by the marvellous spread before them. The ground was covered with a heaped bed of soft leaves, scattered with the signature of violet, jasmine, rose and lily flower petals. The sweet perfume scent was almost far too wonderful for a pair of grubby schoolboys, and had possibly been laid out to simply disguise the stench of sweaty clothing. In the centre of the scented bed lay a large spread of unusual and foreign fruit. The boys sat with mouths watering, staring at the delicious looking fruit, and noticed the odd pinana in between. The fern enclosure was wide and pleasantly spacious, with a low lying length of oak plank mounted to the side at a height suitable for fairies. Four tiny fairy chairs were tucked beneath, all neatly carved with foreign symbols.

‘What’s that?’ Frank asked, noticing a strange looking pot plant seated at the end of the long table. The plant consisted of two large velvety dark green leaves with a most unusual large pod type flower. The pod was completely oval at the back, but the front end came to a sharp point, and looked very much like a beak. It was brightly coloured with thick tropical orange, red and yellow stripes.

‘That my dear, is a parrot plant,’ Madonna announced, beaming with pride while she pranced over to the table where the colourful plant sat quietly. ‘He is my

prize possession.'

Much to Frank's amazement, the parrot plant spread its colourful floral beak open, and mimicked Lily Madonna to perfection.

'Now I've seen everything!' Frank gasped, his eyes almost popping out of the sockets. 'A talking plant, what next?'

'Patroux is my prize possession boys, and I would appreciate it if you treated him with the utmost care during your stay here.'

'Of course, Madonna! Of course!' Frank exclaimed, nodding his head vigorously.

'What a ridiculous name for a talking plant,' Philip muttered.

The exhausted pair sat down on the sweetly-scented bed of leaves, lying back for a moment to soothe their aching limbs. After a short period of rest and relaxation they greedily chomped away at the unusual fruit, satisfying their aching hunger pains. The foreign tastes, combined with ravenous hunger, made the fruit an adventure to the taste buds. Sweet juices flowed down their necks and mashed nango pulp (cross nartjie and mango) oozed down their wrists as they gobbled the scrumptious manna from heaven.

'What's this, Frank?' Philip asked, looking amused. He held up a strange looking dark purple fruit by the stalk. It had a hard smooth texture and was roughly the size of a tennis ball.

'Let me have a taste,' Frank said, grabbing it from Philip and greedily shoving the purple specimen into his mouth. 'Ah yes, it tastes like a crunchy grape, yummy, here, you try some.'

Philip grabbed the dripping sweet ball from his friend and bit into the other side.

'Yes, it's like a cross between a grape and an apple.'

'Must be a grapple then,' Frank chuckled, chuffed with his own sharp wit.

'Mush be,' Philip answered, choking on a mouthful of grapple pulp, and spewing the purple contents over his smelly shirt.

The fairies left the boys alone to enjoy their meal – most probably their last one at that – for they had other more important matters to attend to.

Chapter 19

‘It’s those blasted flower fairies!’ Chimzen announced in horror, standing to his feet and looking a bit shaken. ‘They are the rulers of this forsaken planet, and those boys are in serious trouble.’

‘Oh no!’ the trio squeaked in chorus, having had first-hand experience of the wicked flower fairies in the past.

‘They have set up a magic smokescreen, which has fogged the view of their exact whereabouts. All I can see is that they have headed off in the direction of the valley; other than that it’s just an infernal rainbow haze.’

‘We must hurry, trio, before something terrible happens to them, if something hasn’t happened already by now, that is.’

Without any further orders, they bounced into hoverboard formation, and flew off towards the valley with Master Chimzen standing firmly in position.

‘Just be extremely careful, Malco balls; those wicked creatures will be expecting us, and goodness knows what tricks of treachery they have up their sleeves.’

‘Yes master! On guard master!’ the excited magical balls yelled together, cruising swiftly over several unhappy trees.

The wizard gazed upon the seemingly endless stretch of forest as they approached the distant valley with speed. The long stretch which had taken the boys several hours was only a matter of minutes for the soaring Malco board. Shortly the valley came into full view, looking ever so peaceful and inviting. Chimzen looked over the endless clumps of grass and scattered trees, in complete distrust of the tranquil deception which lay below. He was more than prepared for any potential confrontation that may possibly be awaiting them.

* * * * *

‘Are you ready, ladies?’ Azor screamed, glancing across to her wicked sisters with a serious, sinister stare.

‘Ready Azor!’ they chirped in chorus. They were all positioned in a perfect square as if preparing themselves for a dangerous acrobatic circus routine.

‘Go Gallica! Go Paulina!’ Azor yelled the command.

Rose Gallica began chanting a rosy poisonous rhyme, in a sweet thorn pricking melody, and Violet Paulina followed suit, bringing the powerful poisonous spell to disastrously potent perfection.

‘Roses zare red, oui?’
‘And violuts are blue, mun.’
‘Let our zflower powers unite’
‘Destruchen in full view’
‘Roses zare red, oui?’
‘And violuts are blue, mun.’
‘Millions of zscorpion thorn ones.’
‘And Nigeriun cannabis killer too.’

Paulina and Gallica stood spread apart while surges of magical energy erupted over their flowery head arrangements. Instantly the little roses on Gallica’s perfect headpiece exploded, flying in all directions like popcorn kernels on high heat. The little red roses, including a short piece of thorny stem, began multiplying by the thousand, hovering over Gallica like a swarm of angry bees. At precisely the same moment Paulina’s headpiece began reacting in exactly the same way, with thousands of violet flowers swarming into the air to meet with the thorny roses. The stem of each rose forced its way through the centre of a violet flower, making the stem appear as though it was wearing a little floral blue skirt. The violet skirt spun around the rose stem like a little propeller, enabling it to zip swiftly in all directions. As it propelled the rose forward, the violet flower released an unpleasant sweet-smelling green smoke known by most Nigerians as grass, weed, spliff or electric spinach. Within a matter of seconds each rose had prepared itself with a potent smelling violet skirt, buzzing impatiently above in the thousand, waiting for the command.

‘Roses that are red!
And violets that are blue!
Attack the flying wizard!
Make him hopelessly stoned, or dead will do!’

Azor shrieked the closing rhyme with slippery serpent authority, and directed the swarm of angry rose-violators to the other side of the valley. She had incredible

insight on her surroundings, trusting dark magic to keep her in touch with unknown activities. She had intercepted Chimzen during his attempt at finding the boys, and without a doubt, knew exactly where he was at that point in time.

* * * * *

Chimzen gazed forward in horror, noticing a purplish-green haze floating towards him in the distance, like a sudden freak thunderstorm with dark clouds and colourful rainbows all blended into one.

‘On guard trio! We are about to confront some serious turbulence!’ he cried, pointing his staff ahead, uncertain of what exactly he was up against.

‘Yes master! On guard master!’

The Rose-violators were fast approaching, giving him very little time to think up a suitable spell to counteract the buzzing flower fiends.

‘Oncoming storm, vicious attack...’ he began muttering under his breath, struggling to find suitable words. ‘Oh blast it! It’s not a storm, so that won’t work. There must be something I can use to destroy this deadly flower plague, whatever it may be.’

The poor wizard fumbled at his fluttering beard, at a complete loss for words. He had absolutely no idea what to do or say next. It was as if his brain had suddenly turned to cotton.

‘They’re almost here master! They’re almost here!’ Zip shrieked, her squeaky voice nearly breaking with panic, while she watched the buzzing rose-violators approach without fear.

‘Ah-ha! That’s it!’ Chimzen exclaimed, snapping onto a brilliant idea at the very last second.

*‘My aura encompasses like a mighty shield!
Protection of truth, great light force field!
No harm may come from the slashing thorn!
Pulsating white light of destruction born!’*

With the voice of authority he chanted the powerful spell of protection, waving his magical staff assertively towards the buzzing onslaught. A great white light emanated from his powerful being, surrounding the Malco board and himself with a dazzling shield of truth energy. The onslaught of vicious rose-violators was suddenly upon them, propelling up and over the wizard to avoid the brilliant light. The energy shield immediately responded to the swarming attack, producing

thousands of tiny strands of electrical light energy. They launched towards the unsuspecting rose-violators like miniature heat-seeking missiles, shredding them into useless garden refuse. Thousands of singed rose petals, thorny stems and violet propellers fluttered down from the sky and disappeared into the flaming aura below, leaving behind nothing but small insignificant trails of smoke.

What Chimzen never realized was that the spinning violet flowers were releasing volumes of sweet-scented marijuana smoke into the atmosphere directly above. Looking somewhat puzzled, he sniffed at the air, and noticed the dense green smoke surrounding him.

‘No it can’t be,’ he muttered, ‘I haven’t smelt anything like this for years.’

He forced his sleeve up against his mouth in a hopeless attempt to save himself from being drugged, but it was unfortunately too late for that. He started feeling strange, as though time was standing still, like he had been taken off to another planet, far, far, from Floran. He blinked his eyes rapidly, looking down at his legs to make sure that he was standing firmly on the Malco board. His magical aura began to dissipate as if the energy had been drawn from his radiant being. A drug like this, even though completely natural, has the ability to completely drain a wizard of power and sharp awareness very much like it would any normal person. He stared down at his ivy green robe in a trance, for what seemed like hours, and only a moment, all at the same time.

‘It’s green! It’s green!’ he bellowed, clutching at the end of his garment and breaking out into hysterical fits of laughter.

‘Green-is-clean, Green-is-clean,
If-you-know-what-I-mean,
You-can-touch-it-hold-it,
The-colour-can-be-seen,
Just-one-colour-on-the-television-screen.’

Chimzen sang his forced rhyme to the tune of “This old Man”, and fell over backwards onto the Malco board, chuckling his head off.

Fortunately for him, his previous spell had already taken care of all the rose-violators, except for the unexpected Nigerian violet marijuana fumes. However, the Malco trio were absolutely horrified, having no clue what had suddenly got into their master.

‘Giddy up horsey, giddy up,’ he yelled, sitting up and slapping the Malco board like a spoilt five-year old child mounting a golden retriever and spanking it for a ride.

Zen reluctantly gave the order to proceed, faithfully obedient to his master’s

orders.

‘Zen! Our master is in no way fit to give orders!’ Zip protested, tugging her corner frantically in the opposite direction. Chimzen was standing up by then, jumping up and down like a little boy demanding a ride on the big wheel at the funfair.

‘Up-and-away-superboard! Up-and-away!’

‘We must take him down Zen, before he does something crazy!’ Zip cried.

‘I think you’re right Zip; let’s go down, he’s raving mad.’

Chimzen’s eyes were spiralling with madness; he believed that he was invincible, and no one was going to spoil his fun, least of all a few pesky hoverboard balls. The raving wizard mounted his staff like a witch on a broomstick, shredding his robe as he forced it between his legs in an irrational hurry.

‘To the heavens and beyond!’ he screamed, shaking one arm in the air and laughing with chaotic enthusiasm. ‘I–can–fly–so–so–high–just–like–a–butter–bye–bye!’

With that final triumphant tune, he took a blind leap of insanity over the edge of the Malco board, clutching tightly onto his magical broomstick. Unfortunately, as much as he believed it in his ill frame of mind, there was no way that he was going to defy the laws of gravity.

‘Wheeeeeeee!’ he cried in absolute delight, plummeting towards the earth like a sack of potatoes, absolutely blind to the consequences of his actions. His beard and hair flapped wildly up over his head as he rocketed downwards. He was completely convinced that he was soaring over the valley like the wicked little witch, and cackled to himself in psychotic delight.

Without a single word, the Malco board flung over and accelerated rapidly after the delirious wizard, desperately trying to break his fall before he plummeted to a sticky end. Fortunately they had been flying high, allowing the trio time to gain on his rapid descent.

He noticed the swiftly approaching Malco board, and shooed them away like a swarm of menacing flies. They swung level beneath him with calculated accuracy, maintaining their dropping speed to break his fall as slowly as possible. To the trio’s absolute horror, he landed feet first and shot back into the air like a blasted cannon ball.

‘Oh no Zip, we forgot about the magic jumping ointment on master’s feet!’ Zen cried in dismay.

‘Wheeeee! Now I can really fly!’ he cried, overwhelmed with exhilarating insanity, rocketing straight up like the Apollo Seven. ‘I–am–the–master–of–the–universe! Ha–ha!’

The panic-stricken trio launched to their master's rescue. They had come up with a plan; although very dangerous, it was their only hope of saving him.

The wizard finally exhausted his jumping ointment steam, and promptly resumed his downward plunge. To his absolute raving disgust, he plummeted downwards like a ten ton rock with his robe fluttering over his head like a shredded parachute, exposing his moon and star painted wizard undergarments. The trio reached him with lightning speed. To prevent his feet from touching the board, they approached, using a dangerous calculated side sweep.

'Careful Zen!'

'I'm always careful Zip!' he yelled, homing in swiftly yet cautiously with his corner of the platform. Contrary to Chimzen's wishes of flying his faithful staff to Never-Never Land, his mission came to an abrupt halt as the Malco board swooped in tactfully from the side. They gently connected his calf muscles, shoving him over backwards, and forcing him onto his rear end with his staff jammed brutally between. The combined shock of the fall, and the overpowering drug trip left him lying out cold in the most undignified manner.

* * * * *

'Are you ready, Lily Madonna?' Azor bellowed, commencing eagerly with phase two of the deadly onslaught.

'Ready Azor!' she yelled, sounding much like the great English queen giving her approval for commencement of war. The two evil fairies began chanting together to complete the final spell of attack:

'Sweet-smelling jasmine flower,'
'Trumpet lily, soft yellow probing power,'
'Let my sweet-scented oval wreath combine with thee,'
'A deadly pollen sting encased with flying petals, see,'
'My jasmine wreath lashing its victim like a deadly whip,'
'My stinging lily killer bee probe, the enemy of life will strip,'
'Generate potent floral death by the million,'
'Stinging and whipping to your oblivion.'

With those words the two fairies' headpieces sprouted to life, erupting into thousands upon thousands of angry lily flowers and long intertwined jasmine wreaths. The probing yellow trumpet lily centre formed the back end of the deadly petalled creature, anxiously twitching from left to right in eagerness to cause vicious bodily

harm. Each buzzing lily flower grouped up with a single oval jasmine wreath that spun around it like a hula hoop, in a strange irregular motion.

Finally, Azor yelled to the anxious swarm of dangerous flowers:

'Lashing wreath and deadly trumpet lily!

Seek out the great wizard!

Whip and sting him silly!'

She pointed her tiny fairy finger of authority in Chimzen's direction, and watched with a scaly grin while thousands of deadly lily-whips buzzed off in furious obedience to her wicked instruction.

Paulina sat on the grass with a naughty smile on her face, nibbling at a daisy petal.

'Ya mun, dut wizurd be so stoned, he won't know wut hit him mun,' she chuckled, rolling over on her back in delight.

'You're right about that Paulina,' Azor sniggered, waving her little hand up and down while the endless frantic flower swarm buzzed past. 'He's a dead wizard, that's for sure.'

* * * * *

'What's that, Zip?' Zen wondered, noticing a large green and white coloured haze approach rapidly in the distance.

'I have no idea,' she replied shortly, more preoccupied with her master's wellbeing.

'I think it's another attack Zip,' Zen squeaked, sounding more desperate this time. 'We had better get him to the ground as quickly as possible, before it's too late.'

'Let's move it!' Zet yelled, suddenly overwhelmed with panic.

The Malco board hovered cautiously towards the ground, keeping as level as possible, to ensure the safety of their precious master. The lily-whips were approaching at an incredible speed, with twice the magical potency of the rose-violators. In a matter of seconds the swarming flower fiends were upon the unsuspecting trio and the completely KO'd wizard.

'We need to drop faster!' Zen yelled, horrified by the sudden lily-whip arrival.

'I see what you mean,' Zip squeaked in surprise, not realizing the extent of danger up until then.

The Malcos began increasing their falling speed, desperate to escape the

approaching danger. Due to sudden panic they became somewhat careless with their load, jolting the unconscious wizard like an army patient lying in the back of a hospital jeep encountering rough terrain. The anxious Malco board finally touched ground. What seemed to take a long time took only a few painful seconds.

Chimzen's head slammed on the hoverboard with a thump, and he lay there completely motionless as if he were already dead. Unfortunately it was too late; even though he may not have been aware of it, he was surrounded by thousands of raging lily-whips.

'What are we going to do?' Zip cried, feeling desperate yet helpless.

'Malcos, we must attack!' Zet yelled with enthusiastic confidence.

Within a second they disengaged hoverboard formation, and released Chimzen onto a thick patch of green grass below, allowing him to continue with his seemingly undisturbed sleep. He fell onto his back with his staff still wedged firmly in place. Tufts of mangled white hair were wrapped around his face and neck, and his long beard covered his nose and mouth, all puffed up like a petrified Persian cat. He was consumed by a deep drugged sleep, and looked very much like the undisrupted Rip van Winkle, still sleeping after one hundred years.

Several of the nasty stinging flowers were upon him like a swarm of flies on cow manure, stinging him repeatedly on the face and hands. At the same time, the jasmine whips disengaged and began administering repeated lashes to his body, whipping the tender skin beneath his silk robe. It was quite a horrible sight to see. I mean how can you beat a man while he's down? Even with all the beating and stinging the drugged wizard didn't bat an eyelid.

The trio spun into action, instantly shaping into scorching balls of coal. They zipped back and forth to destroy the lily-whip invaders. The air came alive with the familiar smell of scorched petals and boiling plant sap, as hundreds of feisty plants were incinerated at a roll.

'This plan isn't working guys!' Zip cried in desperation. 'There are just too many of them!'

'Well, what else can we do?' Zen answered in frustration.

Zen suddenly spun off, firing several precise laser beams in all directions, in a desperate effort to gain control over the endless masses of lily-whips. Several tiny red beams launched towards the determined petalled predators, severing them into tiny pieces of scorched plant matter.

'Where are you going, Zet?' Zip screamed, left to battle the swarming attackers all by herself. 'Are you guys mad, leaving me here all by myself?'

'Don't worry, I'll be back!' Zet yelled, completely unheard over the deafening

drone. The swarming lily-whips were like an enormous blasting sandstorm, taking dominion by sheer numbers. Zip was starting to panic, left alone to overpower the tremendous onslaught.

If Chimzen took any more of the deadly stings, he would most surely never wake from his deep drugged sleep. The determined jasmine whips began lashing Zip, moving her aside at their own kamikaze peril, forcing the gap wider for the lily flowers to administer more nasty stings. Zip retaliated, glowing even brighter, rocketing back and forth to save her master, no matter what the cost. Zet had come up with a saving plan, and needed the other two Malcos in order to fulfil it.

‘Come back Zen, you are wasting time!’ Zet squeaked, finding his fellow ball engaged in overwhelming warfare.

‘What is it Zet?’ he yelled.

In a second, the two balls returned to Chimzen’s side and quickly explained things to an angry Zip. The trio bounced to the side and lay in perfect triangular formation. They projected beams up to a point, which spread outwards into a fine wall of laser beams, creating a deadly protection shield around the sleeping wizard. Unfortunately a few lily-whips were trapped on the inside of the laser shield, stinging and lashing him with fury.

‘Down beams!’ Zen squeaked in fright. At once the Malcos lowered the top point of the pyramid’s force field, reducing the laser shield until it almost scorched Chimzen’s large pointed nose. The remaining lily-whips flew backwards in fright, and were instantly frazzled into bits of nothing in an effort to escape the lowered laser shield. The Malcos immediately raised the point of the dangerous shield in fear of harming their precious master. The remaining several thousand lily-whips launched forward, attacking the wizard in blind obedience to the flower fairies’ destructive spell. In a matter of minutes every last lily-whip viper plunged to its death, disappearing into the powerful laser shield, leaving behind nothing but a short-lived, insignificant trail of smoke.

‘If I commanded you to jump into the fire, would you do it Zip?’ Zen asked, giving a squeaky chuckle.

‘Well, even if I was dumb enough to do it Zen, fire can’t harm us anyway.’

‘So true, but you know what I mean?’

Chimzen remained in a deep sleep, gone to that world and very far gone to ours. The trio held up the shield of protection while he lay snoring his head off, just in case there were any more nasty surprises still to come.

Chapter 20

‘I’m completely stuffed,’ Philip complained, clutching his aching belly. ‘A good sleep is all I need, and I’ll be as good as new.’

‘I agree,’ Frank answered, lying back on a pile of sweetly-scented petals, and yawning out loud.

The boys lay back with heavy eyelids and bulging bellies. In a short while they both drifted into a deep and much needed sleep.

An hour or so had passed and long rays of golden sunlight streamed through the peaceful fern leaf abode, the perfect environment for a tranquil and pleasant sleep. All was dead quiet except for the low-pitched snoring sounds coming from Frank and Philip.

The Parrot plant had also been sleeping up until then, and now gently stirred, shuffling its giant plant beak from left to right. Then quite suddenly the colourful parrot beak snapped open and began singing in a deep, blood-curdling, heavy metal yell, something most unexpected from a pot plant:

‘Blackened is the end!

Winter it will send!

Throwing all you see!

Into obscurity!’

Metallica

Frank and Philip sat up in shock, shaken violently from a deep sleep. The parrot plant stopped yelling his metal tune for a moment, popping his beak closed as if surprised that he had actually woken them. Frank turned to face it, looking a bit disorientated, and scowled in anger.

‘How dare you wake us up, you multicoloured talking pansy!’ he barked, wiping his sleepy eyes as he stumbled to his feet.

‘How dare you wake us up, you multicoloured talking pansy!’ the plant echoed in parrot fashion reply.

‘This is not a nightclub; can’t you see we are trying to get some sleep?’ Frank yelled, stumbling towards the plant and clutching his fists tightly in rage. Once again the copycat plant repeated after Frank, mimicking him to perfection. Philip was thinking about school and how he used to also play the copycat game a few years ago. It had to be the most annoying thing to do to someone, but you couldn’t play it with just anyone. If you did it to someone like Frank, you would most surely guarantee yourself a good beating. It was always better to pick on someone weaker than yourself. When he got tired of you repeating after him, he would just have to walk away, and then you could call him names behind his back. That plant had definitely chosen the wrong person to play copycat with.

Frank walked back to the bed of petals and picked up a pinana from the pile of remaining fruit. He clutched at the pineapple skinned banana and flung it towards the unsuspecting parrot plant like a cricketer throwing a fast ball. The pinana spun towards the cheeky plant like a boomerang, narrowly missing its multicoloured beak, and bounced off the table below. Once again the excited pot plant broke out in song, shaking his head wildly as if in way of defence:

‘Death of mother earth!

Never a rebirth!

Evolution’s end!

Never will it mend!’

Metallica

‘This plant is singing about earth, Frank, and what we are doing to it!’ Philip exclaimed in surprise. ‘He’s not very far wrong, I must say.’

‘Yeah, like this disgusting place is any better!’ Frank barked, taking a deep breath and tossing a grapple furiously towards the raving plant. Patroux got it right in the beak and went flying backwards, completely uprooted from his pot. The poor plant landed with a thump on the wooden table and fell down beak first onto the floor, with a display of muddy roots and a large grapple wedging its copycat beak silent.

‘Problem solved, now we can get some sleep,’ Frank muttered, wiping his face and resuming sleep position.

‘Frank!’ Philip exclaimed, staring at the uprooted parrot plant in horror, ‘Lily Madonna is going to kill us!’

‘I don’t care Philip, I’m tired.’

The boys were both extremely tired and it would have been far too easy just to go back to sleep again, which is exactly what Frank did. Philip, however, couldn’t just leave the poor plant lying on its pathetic beak like that, so he carefully picked it

up and placed it back in the pot. He replaced as much of the fallen soil as possible, and pressed it firmly around the battered stem. Patroux looked as good as new, except for the sticky grapple wedged between his beak.

Philip had decided on removing it once he and Frank had both had a good sleep first. He lay next to his friend listening to his soft snores, and soon fell into a deep sleep as well.

* * * * *

‘My darlings, what flavour should we make it then?’ Lily Madonna asked, standing out in the open valley, gazing at her sister fairies in question.

‘I’m so glad we finally took care of that meddlesome wizard,’ Jasmine Azor interrupted with delight.

‘Oui, it is ze very zgood thing zwe did,’ Rose Gallica agreed, slapping her hands together with wicked glee.

‘What flavour, ladies?’

‘Choclut mun! Ya know all schulboys like choclut, don’t ya mun?’ Violet Paulina snapped, pouting her flowery nose up at Madonna.

‘Chocolate drink, that’s appalling!’ Madonna sneered, crossing her arms and shaking her floral headpiece at Paulina. ‘Since when do children drink chocolate? I’ve never heard of such nonsense before.’

‘Have you ever been near an earthling child before, Madonna Lily?’ Azor asked.

‘No never, why, what’s your point then?’

‘Well, how would you know whether they like it or not then?’

‘Er-well, yes, maybe,’ Madonna replied sheepishly, looking a bit stumped.

‘Choclut drink it is then, mun!’ Paulina cackled in delight.

‘Don’t be so over confident my dear!’ Madonna snapped, gazing at Paulina condescendingly with her wide light blue eyes. ‘Who says they do like chocolate drink?’

‘Don’t be sully mun, kids love all tings dat be sweet, I’m telling ya mun,’ Paulina replied confidently.

‘Chocolate it is then,’ Azor said firmly, placing a large wooden bowl on the ground in front of them. ‘Who cares what flavour it is anyway, as long as they drink it? We’re wasting time standing here talking nonsense.’

‘Are you ready, ladies?’

‘Ready Azor!’

The flower fairies were in the process of performing an evil spell, a special one for the boys; the most evil of all. They each plucked a petal from one of their precious head arrangements and placed it carefully into the wooden bowl. Then they all stepped back while Azor chanted her nasty magic:

*'Wooden bowl we command you fill,
Sweet chocolate juice that brings a thrill,
Blending now with the bitter petal,
The blood of man to sap will settle,
Transformation of the human being,
To the walking tree on Floran seen,
May this curse forever hold,
Leaves, bark and roots their lives unfold.'*

With these words the petals at the base of the wooden vessel began to sizzle and dissolved into a sticky mass of sap, releasing a sweet brown chocolate liquid, which slowly filled the bowl to the brim. The flower fairies gazed over the bowl of chocolate juice, giggling amongst themselves like naughty schoolgirls. Azor reached for the magic chocolate mix and raised it carefully, muttering a few strange sentences over the brown liquid. The chocolate juice transformed instantly into a solid block of ice for easy transportation, allowing her to fly it home with ease.

* * * * *

'Look zat those zdarlings,' Gallica cooed, gazing over the sleeping boys and gently stroking Frank on his soft spiky hair.

'I hope they have sweet dreams at least, because they will be their last,' Azor sniggered, placing the frozen brew on the wooden ledge.

'Look what they've done to dear Patroux!' Lily Madonna yelled, removing the dripping grapple wedged between his floral beak, and stroking him with a genuine concern. The parrot plant shook its beak and leaves wildly, almost tipping itself and the little pot over, with drops of grapple juice spraying in all directions. The poor plant silently flexed its beak open and closed to soothe the ache, and hastily slurped down the remaining grapple pulp and sweet juice that remained.

'Patroux needed to learn a little lesson for bad behaviour, Madonna,' Azor said, forcing her hand over Madonna's mouth to prevent any more loud protests. She pulled Azor's hand away in outrage.

'All he has done for us; and this is the thanks he gets!'

‘He was making a scene, Madonna, what other choice did we have?’

‘He only ever had good intentions Azor!’

‘Good, that’s exactly the problem; there is no place for good on this planet. Unless you also choose to bend that way, we can take GOOD care of you too, and you can also sit in a pot for the rest of your life, if that is what you truly wish for?’

Lily Madonna turned her back on Azor’s cutthroat hatred, sadly knowing that there was no place for any kind-heartedness on planet Floran, unless you were willing to pay the price for it.

Paulina, Gallica and Madonna always had a deeply buried touch of goodness within themselves, something they had received from the truth of their creation; something they could never quite relate to. Azor on the other hand was rotten through and through.

The two boys remained completely undisturbed through all the noise, and the flower fairies watched patiently, waiting for them to wake.

The fairies sat at the little wooden ledge playing a game of floral Snap, seated in pairs, with the winner of each pair challenging the other. The cards were very similar to those on earth with smaller insignificant flowers ranging from cosmos weed to daffodils, each symbolizing a number from one through to ten. Much to Gallica’s delight, the old English rose represented the queen, with its magnificent beauty and thorn stabbing authority. The king was represented by the great old oak, with majestic authority and age old wisdom. The ace card had an ordinary little picture of a tiny mustard seed printed on it, the card representing one, yet usually possessing the greatest value in a game of cards – just like that insignificant little mustard seed which develops into one of the largest of all trees.

‘Snap Dragon!’ Azor bellowed, slapping her card down in spiteful victory. Then she grabbed the flowery pile of winnings, and shoved them into her lap with all the other cards.

‘Ag cum on mun!’ Paulina protested, reaching over to snatch her cards back. ‘Ya be cheating again, dere’s no ways dat ya cud be hiving da musturd seed af spades mun.’

‘I beat you fair and square, you blooming idiot,’ Azor snapped indignantly.

The game had been going on for several frustrating hours, with Azor taking a win at every hand. Her deception was quite brilliant, magically producing the perfect card at exactly the right moment. The other fairies were slowly getting a bit hot under the petals with her scheming ways, finding her dark magic completely inappropriate during a simple game of cards. The wicked fairy just couldn’t handle losing, and her deceptive card tricks were making her look more like a foolish loser

than a heroic winner.

‘Zyou win Zagain, Azor,’ Gallica rapped, slapping her cards down in the most unladylike manner.

‘What do you mean, Gallica? We haven’t even started yet.’

Gallica sat on her cute little fairy chair with her arms tightly folded and her bottom lip pulled down, scowling at Azor like the schoolgirl that didn’t get her way.

‘Gallica also has a gift, my dear,’ Madonna chirped, chuckling in the background. ‘You are a magician with those cards, Azor, and she is a fortune teller: Gallica knows her future in this game, the fact that she is going to lose once again, how absolutely priceless!’

Azor continued playing Snap Dragon like a gambling thief, as if piles of green bills were spread out over the table for the taking. Lily Madonna didn’t find it quite so amusing when it was her turn to challenge the cheating “Snap Dragon” master, though.

‘Znot so funny anyzmore, Madonna. Oui?’

‘Oh do keep your flowery beak shut, Gallica,’ Madonna snapped in disgust.

Frank finally woke from all the commotion, and looked up to see what all the fuss was about.

‘Wake up, Philip,’ he muttered, pushing his friend on the shoulder.

‘Huh-what?’ Philip gasped, sitting upright with a startled jerk. ‘I just had the most terrible dream, Frank; we were being burnt by those terrible Indian plants.’

‘Calm down Philip, there’s no fire here, at least not that kind anyway.’

The fairies immediately stopped complaining, laid down their flowery hands, and gazed upon the awakened boys in surprise.

‘How did you sleep, lads?’ Azor asked, with a sweetish smile pasted to her cold face.

‘Okay,’ Philip mumbled, looking a bit startled by all the sudden attention. Frank turned his head and stared into the corner to see what had become of the poor parrot plant. His olive skinned cheeks glowed red as he turned to face the fairies.

‘What did you do to my precious Patroux?’ Madonna asked Frank in a condescending tone. She fluttered her sleek transparent wings, and landed at his side in a flash.

‘Well um, well,’ Frank stammered, wishing he could disappear into his shell like a tortoise.

‘Well what, my boy?’

‘It was making such a terrible noise, and we couldn’t sleep,’ Frank bleated, wishing he could escape those cold piercing eyes. ‘And the more we told it to keep quiet, the louder it sang.’

‘How would you like it if I shoved a grapple in your mouth, my boy?’ Madonna snapped, edging towards him with a look of intense disapproval. Frank started to apologize for knocking the parrot plant out of its pot. Philip immediately placed his hand over Frank’s mouth, cutting him short in mid-sentence, and yanked him back sharply onto his lap.

‘I put it back in the pot, don’t mention it to her Frank,’ Philip whispered hurriedly into his ear.

‘What was that all about then?’ Madonna demanded, starting to feel a bit paranoid over their strange behaviour. ‘You knocked Patroux out of his pot?’

‘N-No s-sorry I didn’t, I must have dreamt it,’ Frank stuttered, feeling tightly trapped between what had already been said, and what he had to say.

‘Never mind, Frank,’ Azor interrupted, placing the bowl of chocolate sludge between the boys. ‘Madonna can get a bit over emotional about her silly plant. He’s in the corner over there, safe and sound, no harm done.’

‘No harm done? I’ll force feed you with a grapple, Azor, then you can say no harm done,’ she snapped. Azor glared back at her with eyes that could make hell freeze over. The lily fairy knew very well that she was no contest for Azor, so she promptly turned around and flew off to comfort her precious plant in the corner.

Frank breathed a quiet sigh of relief, probably for the first time ever, grateful to Azor for her abrupt interruptions.

‘Right, now that all that squabbling is over with, let’s proceed with our little surprise,’ Azor announced, bubbling over with distasteful satisfaction as she held the icy chocolate mixture up to the boys. ‘I’m sure the two of you must be feeling quite parched after the rough ordeal you have both been through over the last day or so? My sister fairies say it is a schoolboy’s delight, look, it’s chocolate.’

Azor swayed the large bowl of icy mixture under Frank’s nose, and reached forward in an effort to hand it to him. Philip noticed Frank’s hesitation, and shuffled to the front. He hastily grabbed the bowl and placed it to his lips, eager to gulp down the delightful mixture. Azor watched Philip in anticipation, grinning from ear to ear.

‘Philip, stop!’ Frank yelled, shoving the bowl away from his mouth, and spilling large quantities of icy chocolate drink over his trousers. Philip lowered the bowl carefully to the ground, to prevent any further spillage. Azor was absolutely fuming with rage.

‘What sort of thanks is this, you ungrateful schoolboy?’ she demanded, shaking her fairy fists in protest.

‘Yeah, what’s your problem, Frank?’ Philip asked, his face all scrunched

up in confusion. Azor knew the boys were wising up to her schemes, and rather surprisingly, she turned around and flew straight out through the entrance in a state of rage. The other fairies followed after her, with their tiny arms folded, and their faces pouted upwards with expressions of absolute disgust.

‘What did you do that for Frank? Now you’ve insulted them.’

‘Because I’m damned sure that they are trying to poison us!’ Frank barked, quite taken aback by all the upheaval he had caused.

‘Are we dead yet from all the fruit we’ve eaten Frank?’

‘No, but that was different.’

‘In what way was it different Frank? Or was it just different because we were starving, and now we don’t need fairy charity anymore?’

‘Shut up Philip, before I...’

‘Before you WHAT Frank? Before you box me? The answer to all your problems; that’s why we’re here in the first place, remember!’

Frank was suddenly very quiet, unsure of how to deal with his mixed feelings. Philip lay on his back, with his shoe perched up on one knee, twitching it anxiously.

‘You’re right Birch, this is my fault. I’m really sorry for getting you tied up in this mess.’

* * * * *

Patroux had been sitting very quietly in the corner, still recovering from the grapple episode, when suddenly he began chirping again, ‘Chimzen! Chimzen!’

The boys looked up in surprise, and much to their amazement, there stood the wizard himself, smiling at them in delight.

‘Chimzen!’ they both cried out in chorus. ‘How did you find us?’

‘Hello boys! Good to see you again!’ The wizard chuckled, walking closer. ‘I knew the flower fairies would take good care of you while I was away.’

‘Y-You mean, t-they really are your friends?’ Frank asked, stammering in embarrassment.

‘Of course they are, boys, we go way back. I’m really sorry I had to leave you here; there were a few rather unfortunate things I had to take care of back home.’

‘What happened?’ Philip enquired out of curiosity.

‘W-Well, never you mind, just wizard business as usual you know,’ he replied, surprisingly rather unsure of himself.

‘Where are the Malcos, Chimzen?’ Frank asked.

‘The Malcos?’ he answered, looking a bit lost for words.

‘Yes, the three little silver balls that travel with you,’ Philip answered, looking a bit puzzled by his slow response.

‘Oh-oh of course the Malcos; they’re outside,’ he replied, looking a bit pale, almost sickly green. ‘Excuse me, it seems I am starting to develop a bad memory in my old age. So tell me boys, how well have the flower fairies been taking care of you?’

‘Very well, Chimzen,’ Philip hastily replied, not wanting to upset him with any unnecessary scepticism. ‘The fruit they have given us to eat has been amazing.’

‘Where are they now, lad?’

‘Er, well, gone for a walk,’ Frank stammered in reply.

‘Aren’t they absolutely beautiful, don’t you think?’ Chimzen asked, looking a bit over anxious for a reply.

‘Amazing!’ they both announced in song.

‘What’s that in the bowl, boys? No, wait, don’t tell me, that’s the flower fairy speciality: chocolate juice!’ he exclaimed, kissing his fingertips like a French chef. ‘That has to be the most amazing drink in the world.’

‘Frank’s a bit paranoid; he seems to think it’s poisoned or something,’ Philip said, shaking his head and grinning.

‘Nonsense Philip!’ Frank snapped, hastily grabbing the bowl and gulping down the magic juice. ‘Wow, this is absolutely amazing! Tastes almost like a mango flavoured chocolate milkshake. I know that doesn’t sound good, but it tastes absolutely amazing. Here, Philip, try some.’

‘You’re right, Frank, it’s absolutely magic!’ Philip exclaimed, after taking a gigantic gulp.

‘I told you!’ Chimzen yelled, clutching his hands tightly with sparkling, deceptive eyes.

‘Here, you have some,’ Philip said, handing the bowl eagerly across to him.

‘Oh, no thank you!’ he exclaimed, taking a fearful step back. ‘I’ve just had a big lunch; if I have anything more I will pop.’

The concoction of magical poison flowed into their stomachs, and was absorbed rapidly into their bloodstreams to perform a miraculous transformation of permanent floral disaster. Philip reached towards Frank to brush a leaf off his neck, but much to his horror it remained intact like a permanent fixture. Frank yelled in pain when Philip plucked the flourishing leaf, only to find several more sprouting wildly from where it came. Frank turned to face Philip, and noticed his ginger thatch of hair was rapidly being replaced by bunches of autumn red and yellow leaves. At the same time it appeared as though the blood was being drained

from his face, leaving him with a light grained, bark finish. Frank gazed down at his hands, which appeared to be growing in length, and shrinking in size, with his soft schoolboy hands transformed instantly into those of a wrinkly old man's, with a dark brown deeply grained finish.

Fresh, newly-grown leaves sprouted from the ends of his sleeves and from in between his buttons in wild multicoloured bunches. It seemed as though each hair follicle was being replaced by a leaf, with Frank, especially, experiencing great discomfort in the nether regions while large bunches of leaves exploded from his trousers. Then his trousers suddenly disappeared, much to the poor boy's embarrassment.

Philip's school shoes suddenly went "pop", disappearing into thin air while his feet began to shrink and elongate into a hairy clump of hideous fibrous, knotted roots. The boys squirmed in pain and horror as their blood turned to sap, draining their very human existence to make them permanent garden shade beings. They gazed upon their new bark appearances in absolute disbelief; they had transformed into flourishing living trees.

Chimzen stood before them, cackling with evil laughter, behaving nothing like the wizard they had grown to love. Then quite suddenly he vanished in a blast of black smoke and reappeared as Azor herself. She was still cackling at them, taking great pleasure in the absolute brilliance of her ugly deception.

'You foolish boys, how could you fall for such a stupid trick?' she screamed, falling over backwards, holding her sides to contain the wicked laughter. 'Now you are both nothing but useless firewood. You should have listened to your friend, Philip; he's the only one around here with a bit of savvy. A bit of savvy was obviously not good enough for my master trickery, I guess.'

'She's right, Frank; sorry for not believing you,' Philip mumbled, hanging his leafy head down in shame.

'It's not your fault. I also took the bait just like you did.'

'We came here to change from being monkeys, Frank; now we are a pair of trees, the things monkeys enjoy most.'

'Isn't that ironic?'

The other flower fairies had returned, and were all giggling amongst themselves as they watched the branchy schoolboys gaze at each other in misery.

'Ya mun Azor, dat be much better dan an ordinary curd trick mun,' Paulina chirped, impressed with her sister fairy's masterly deception.

'How did you do that, Azor?' Frank asked. He had very little strength left in him to retaliate and hung his leafy head in despondent misery.

‘Well, tree boy, we are not the rulers here for nothing. With our magical abilities we can be whoever, whenever we like, and make you whatever we want you to be when we like.’ The wicked fairy boasted like an immature spoilt child, with far too much undeserved power at her disposal.

‘Why did you make us trees then? It’s so boring,’ Frank asked, in a feeble attempt to throw an insult.

‘Boring?’ Azor snapped, shocked by the question, ‘Well...’

‘It’s like this Frank, or should I call you Russell?’ Lily Madonna interrupted with a chuckle, eager to get back at him for earlier issues. ‘All the plant life on this planet is under our command, my dear, and by turning you boys into trees, we are quite simply keeping the pair of you in place, firmly rooted if you know what I mean? Human beings are such meddlesome creatures, and who knows what trouble you would get up to here as boys? Just be grateful that we made you trees. Look at poor Patroux in the corner over there; he’ll be confined to the pot for the rest of his life. That is, of course, if you don’t decide to knock him out of it again, Frankie boy.’

‘Never mind, lads, as trees you have great potential. Think of it; you will both have the responsibility of being branch managers. As...’

Frank and Philip gazed at the parrot plant in the corner, while Lily Madonna droned on in the background, amusing herself with her own cheesy wit.

‘Is that a person?’ Frank whispered to Philip, looking puzzled. ‘I had no idea that that could possibly be anything more than an annoying parrot pot plant. I hope I didn’t hurt him too badly.’

‘I guess the plant could be a person, seeing that we are also supposed to be,’ Philip replied, attempting to scratch his itching bark butt with his twiggy fingers. *“No matter how beautiful and trusting they may seem, never trust any of them.”* Those were Chimzen’s very words, Frank, and just look where trusting these Floranion beings has got us now.’

‘We always did have our suspicions though. I should have stuck with my gut feeling from the start; now look at the trouble we’re in.’

‘Don’t blame yourself, Frank. You have to admit the deception was brilliant.’

‘Indeed it was; especially the fake Chimzen appearance. That has to be the cherry on the cake.’

The boys had the most unpleasant time with the flower fairies, with their cunning wickedness out in full bloom. The fairies teased and mocked them, plucking leaves from their sensitive branches, and cackling like demons while Frank tried to stand on his uneven roots, and promptly fell over like a two-legged tripod. He couldn’t

bear to be in their presence a moment longer and attempted a dash for freedom. Unfortunately he underestimated the restricted abilities possessed by a weighty tree and plummeted down trunk over roots.

‘Yo timber!’ Azor bellowed, shoving him down like a newly-axed tree. Frank launched forward, trying his best to break his fall with his branchy arms. His twig-like fingertips snapped off like toothpicks, leaving him sprawled out over the ground, writhing in pain. The wicked fairies cackled away until their sides nearly split, watching Frank struggle his way into an upright seated position.

‘Don’t worry, my boy, your fingers will grow back soon,’ Madonna chuckled.

‘Yeah, a bit of pruning never did a good tree any harm.’ Azor added her ten cents’ worth.

The fairies eventually tired of their little game of torture, and returned to their little chairs to resume a game of Snap Dragon.

The boys sat in despair with their leafy heads hung heavily forward. Frank clutched at the remains of his throbbing branchy fingers, hoping to awaken soon from the terrible nightmare.

‘I wonder where Chimzen has got to?’ Philip asked, sounding quite desperate. ‘He’s our only hope.’

Frank gazed dismally at the crumpled bed of flower petals without uttering a single word.

Chapter 21

‘I feel so dizzy and nauseous,’ Chimzen complained, forcing himself onto his hands and knees. The trio disengaged their protective shield, to prevent their master from being harmed by their deadly lasers. His hair was a mangled mess, as if he had just woken from a night’s disrupted sleep, and his entire body was covered with throbbing swollen sores and slash marks. His ivy green robe was filthy and crumpled, and his skin complexion almost matched its colour. The poor man looked rather green from the marijuana intoxication earlier that morning, unjustly reaping the same consequences as an overindulgent pot smoker. He felt horribly ill, and his entire body burned from the nasty sores. He had a vague recollection of the violent lily-whip attack, but absolutely no idea why his rear-end ached the way it did, and he felt far too embarrassed to give it any mention.

Soon his pale green complexion returned to normal, the dizziness left, and his cheeks were restored to their usual rosy colour. The inflicted wounds were hurting terribly, especially the nasty stings, but he would have to ignore the pain for the time being as there were far more urgent matters to attend to. He placed his quivering hand into his pocket and pulled out a couple of semi-squashed blue plums, and eagerly guzzled them down to satisfy the unusually ravenous hunger he felt.

‘Are you okay master?’ Zip asked, displaying her usual lady ball concern. Chimzen had been very quiet since he had woken, slowly restoring his senses while he watched the late afternoon sun sink below the horizon.

‘Of course, I’m fine. Thank you for saving my life, Malcos,’ he replied softly in an unusually gruff voice, and tried his best to force a smile. ‘We must move on; I can’t believe the time already.’

‘Yes master!’ the trio answered in chorus.

‘Hoverboard formation trio!’ he commanded.

‘Are you okay to fly, master?’ Zip asked, a bit reluctant to respond.

‘Shut up Zip!’ Zen snapped. ‘Just do as you are told!’

‘Not to worry Zip, I’ll be just fine,’ Chimzen reassured the quivering ball,

stroking her shiny head.

The Malco board was ordered in the direction from where the attack had come, and took off more cautiously than usual. Whether this was because they were unsure of Chimzen's mental status, or whether they were afraid of another vicious onslaught, I am not entirely sure.

Besides having to deal with many aches and pains, Chimzen was beginning to feel very frustrated. They had been searching for quite some time already, and there was absolutely no sign of any flower fairies or schoolboys for miles. It was starting to get quite dark by now, and visibility was very poor, even with all three Malco balls shining brightly.

'Blast it, where can they be?' he muttered, straining his eyes to make light of anything. 'This is like looking for a damned needle in a haystack; the thought of having to stay on this god-forsaken planet another night makes my blood curdle.' The little fern fairy dwelling blended so perfectly with its surroundings, it was like trying to find a guerrilla soldier warring in the jungle, fitted with full camo gear.

'My goodness trio, I think that's them!' he exclaimed, pointing out a few colourful outlines below, scuttling across the shadowy valley. 'Blast it! I've been mistaken; it's only a group of trees and shrubs returning to the forest after yesterday's blast. I have a good mind to destroy this entire infernal planet, with nothing left to go back home.'

'Look master!' Zen exclaimed, guiding the other Malco balls down towards the ground. 'It's a black and yellow school tie, master.'

'Right you are Zen!' Chimzen cried in delight, 'one of the boys must have dropped it there as a sign of their whereabouts, hoping we would find it. Just as well they have such bright school colours, isn't it?'

Squinting anxiously in all directions, he stepped off the Malco platform. The trio immediately disengaged, following closely behind.

'Master, did you hear that?' Zip squeaked.

'Yes indeed Zip; it sounds like hysterical laughter. The hysterical laughter of a wicked flower fairy, that is.'

Chapter 22

‘I tink it’s starting ta get a bit durk, don’t ya tink mun?’ Paulina said, slapping her cards down in defeat. ‘It’s bad enuf ya be cheating in tha daylight Azor; in tha durkness we gut no chunce mun.’

‘Lights!’ Azor commanded, snapping her dainty fingers together; preceded by a fit of hysterical cackling. Instantly the little abode lit up like a witch’s séance, with several independent flames sparking into existence, scattered about the room, fuelled on nothing but fresh air.

Frank and Philip sat shivering in fear, their little hearts pumping thick sap through their barky trunks in terror. Their near death experience with fire the night before was enough to put the fear of hell into anyone. Being a tree only exacerbated their feelings towards the deadly flame. Back home, they would most probably be used as firewood, or even worse: paper, pulped and sliced into the finest writing material, used to make exercise books, textbooks or art pads.

Philip forced all these scary thoughts from his mind, and imagined he was at home watching television, and eating chocolate with his family, something he would only ever possess as a fading memory now.

‘You look a bit hot under the collar, Frank,’ Azor rapped, gazing at the fuming tree boy with a cynical smirk on her face. ‘I can make you really boil, if that’s what you want?’

‘Go to blazes!’ Frank retaliated angrily, without giving the consequence to his outburst a second thought.

‘Go to blazes hey? I’ll show you: *go-to-blazes*, tree twerp!’

‘Little flame flickering from black magic light!’

Torment the scowling tree, wicked schoolboy ignite!’

With those words, Azor raised one of her dainty fingers, and directed one of the little floating flames towards Frank. One of the light givers sprang into action, and danced towards him eagerly from across the room, with its fiery head flickering

wildly in delight. The boys stared at her with eyes out on twigs, rooted to the ground in silence, completely panic-stricken by the approaching flame. The flower fairies were literally rolling on their backs with laughter as they watched Frank back away in horror. The little flame perched itself neatly under Frank's left branch pit, bobbing against him as he jolted back and forth in fright. Fortunately for Frank, his bark was thick, and he could take a fair amount of heat before he felt any pain.

'Help Philip! Help!' Frank screamed. Philip raised his left branch and started slapping at Frank wildly in an attempt to extinguish the sneaky little flame. Leaves scattered in all directions, but to no avail, as he was only fanning the cheeky flame, and making it burn all the more fiercely.

* * * * *

'Enough!' a voice bellowed from the entrance. Chimzen stepped out from behind the large boulder at the entrance, his face alive with furious rage.

'Chimzen!' everyone including the fairies exclaimed in surprise. The boys gazed at him, filled with immense relief. Frank never even noticed the smoke rising from his trunk while the flame continued to burrow into him like a blow torch.

'So you think you are a bright spark, Azor?' he asked the evil fairy with blunt sarcasm, his gaze fixed to her like daggers. 'Go, Malco trio!'

Zip spun towards Frank like a bullet, and absorbed the menacing flame inside her shiny little body like a robin slurping a worm. She glowed very brightly for a moment, extinguishing the potent magic flame; then returned to her usual silvery self. With a powerful blast, the brilliant Malco lady extinguished the tiny fire erupting on Frank's trunk before it caused him any pain. Zip joined the others in a triangular position, surrounding the three stunned flower fairies. Unfortunately they were too fast for this, and hastily flew off to the Wizard's side, instantly transforming into four identical Chimzens.

'Shield on, Malcos!' he bellowed, 'they will not get away this time!'

The trio immediately surrounded the four identical Chimzens, who were now standing closer to the entrance, and projected light upwards to create a large laser pyramid jail. This was where the flower fairies had made a mistake with their deception; the real Chimzen was covered in sting sores and slash marks, and they were all perfect replicas of a Chimzen with perfect skin. The trio immediately identified the four fake wizards and rapidly spread the laser shield across their path, dividing the pyramid prison into two separate halves. The shield on Chimzen's side was dropped, allowing him to slip out at the side. The side shield was restored again and the centre

one was dropped, allowing the four raging fakes more space to move around.

The Chimzen imitators changed back to themselves, cursing the real wizard for what he had done to them. Azor rattled off several dark spells in vain to free herself from the magical laser prison, while Chimzen, not in the slightest bit worried, watched in silence. His power was far superior to theirs; they knew it, and they loathed him for it.

Azor may have had certain insights which Chimzen never had, but that was only because he chose not to. He would have absolutely nothing to do with the dark side.

‘According to my insight, you are supposed to be dead, *Chimzen-The-Damn-Great*,’ Azor sniggered.

‘Well, I guess your insight wasn’t very accurate then, was it Azor?’

‘My insight is always accurate, damn you!’

‘I think you are the one that’s damned, my darling.’

‘What was your protection? How did you block me, you rat?’

‘The same way I’m doing it now, Azor; look around you,’ he spoke solemnly. ‘Only this time, you are on the inside.’ The trio held their position firmly, unable to contain their squeaky giggles.

‘Those wretched balls!’ Azor barked.

‘Well, at least I’m the one with the balls around here,’ the wizard chirped, rolling his head back and laughing loudly.

‘Chimzen, it’s so good to see you, we thought you had disappeared!’ Philip cried.

‘I can’t tell you how glad I am to see the pair of you,’ he answered, blasting a big sigh of relief. ‘It’s not going to be that easy to get rid of me, my boy.’

‘Your face looks terrible with all those nasty sores; what happened to you?’

‘Yes it does indeed!’ Frank gasped.

‘That’s a long story; I’ll tell you about it some time.’

‘First we were monkeys, now we are trees,’ Frank said, sounding rather despondent. ‘We would have been better off not even coming here in the first place.’

‘Not to worry, my boy, everything is going to be just fine. I’m really sorry that you both had to go through all of this.’ Frank smiled at the wizard, comforted by his words of genuine concern, and feeling very relieved to see him again.

The three flower fairies remained seated, gazing at Chimzen through the transparent green laser shield, almost smoking with hate. They had a very good idea what was in store for them and they didn’t like it one little bit.

* * * * *

The small group sat for a while discussing the previous day's journey, and the hell of the events they had all been exposed to, with many near death experiences.

'She calls the pot plant Patroux!' Chimzen exclaimed, after hearing Frank's little grapple story outrage. 'That's impossible! Patroux is the very reason these flower fairies exist.' The group turned to watch the parrot plant sitting on the ledge with its colourful beak hung over in silence, no longer under the control of Azor's cursed power.

'Patroux was always a great lover of plants, trees and generally all things green,' Chimzen began, stroking the parrot plant on his sagging beak. 'He decided to make a journey to this forsaken planet, about twenty years back or so, to gain control over the darkness it possessed, and rule over it in truth like a flower king.'

'W-what are you saying?' Frank stammered in disbelief. 'Do you mean that I walloped a poor wizard like yourself out of his pot?'

'Not a wizard, Frank, a Druid, and a very brilliant one at that,' Chimzen corrected, not sounding too concerned. 'It wasn't your fault, Frank. I mean, how were you to know? Much to his dismay, Azor had put a spell on him to make him babble on like a parrot and sing dreadful rhymes about the destruction of earth. The planet dominated by mankind despised the creatures inhabiting Floran.'

'Oh,' Frank answered, flushed with embarrassment.

'Many years ago Patroux confronted me with his grand idea, having travelled on many occasions with me to various different planets. He had no method of magical interplanetary transport and insisted on returning to Floran with me, time and time again. I had warned him several times of the dangers of this treacherous place, but he had insisted pointblank on returning. Hence the creation of the flower fairies. After many a close shave, I vowed never to return to this place.'

'However Patroux had good intentions, so after much convincing I agreed to come back here one last time. That was a big mistake. Patroux had collected a few petals of Gallica French Rose, African Violet Paulina, Madonna Trumpet Lily, and the Greek Jasmine Azor. He combined these petals with a fairy spell which had taken many years to perfect – a fairy recipe bought in secrecy from a white witch in New Hampshire. The mute flower fairies were then given a character spell derived from the earth country which each flower represented, which explains their strange accents. There was a good chance that the experiment may have been a success, if it wasn't for the Greek Jasmine.' Chimzen stood staring into space, lost in dark memories.

'And then?' Philip asked anxiously.

The wizard snapped from his daze and proceeded hesitantly, 'Then... Then. We had many nasty experiences with the Jasmine creeper. One day visiting Floran, while

Patroux was about his antics, I was lured in by an overwhelmingly pleasant Jasmine smell, and couldn't resist the urge to go a bit closer. Quite suddenly the sweet-smelling jasmine vines wrapped around me, and almost suffocated me to death like a constricting viper, tightly coiled around my neck. Fortunately Patroux saved my life, chanting a spell in my defence. Much against my better judgement, he insisted on using the Jasmine as the fourth fairy, insisting she would make a good leader.

'The flower fairies were amazing, and Patroux was overwhelmed by their intelligence and breathtaking beauty. He asked me to leave him here, as he felt confident that his brilliant scheme was a success. Now he would have actual flower beings to assist him with his rule over Floran. Rather reluctantly I left him here and returned home alone.

'As I suspected, the fairies manipulated Patroux's kind nature, robbing him of all his powerful secrets and his herbal magic abilities. With all his good intentions and character changing spells, the flower fairies remained evil at heart, interbred with perverse Floran corruption. Any bit of kindness left within the others, was soon manipulated into pure wickedness by Azor the terrible. The fairies were able to transform themselves into anything, having all Patroux's power at hand. He was manipulated by Azor, who cleverly turned him into a tree, using one of his very own spells to do the dirty. The very same spell was used to transform the two of you.

'The poor Druid was released into the forest and left to wander about, tormented day and night by the rest of these dreadful creatures, regretting the day he had ever set foot on this forsaken planet. He was able to hold back many attacks with his powerful tongue, although I can't image how dreadful it must have been. His best defence was to blend in with the environment; being a tree, that wasn't too hard for him to do. I returned on several occasions to try and convince him to return with me as he was, but his conscience just wouldn't allow him to do so. He has placed himself in this dreadful position, and takes sole responsibility for the warped outcome of his flower fairy creation, looking out for the first opportunity to make things right, even if it means losing his life in the process.

'Many times we have tried to catch them, but it was hopeless; they were constantly changing form and disappearing, making the task near impossible. I guess the poor Druid made an attempt at catching them one time too many, so they simply confined him to a pot. Now that I think of it, how absolutely bizarre; Patroux and the flower fairies have completely swapped roles.'

'So what chance do we have of being human again?' Frank asked, sounding worried.

'You are very lucky, boys; I've managed to finally catch the flower devils red-

handed, so everything is going to be quite alright for the pair of you.'

'What are you going to do Chimzen?'

'They're gone Chimzen! They're gone!' Philip yelled in horror, extending a branch towards the Malco Prison.

'Don't you worry,' he said, responding to Philip's look of horror with a chuckle, 'they're just testing us with trickery. They are either invisible, or they have turned themselves into ants, and are trying to find a gap. They've got no chance my friend, with the trio in charge, no chance at all.'

'Run! Run!' Patroux shrieked, in an alarming squawk, the first time he had made a sound since Chimzen's arrival.

* * * * *

Standing at the entrance to the fern enclosure with dark glaring button eyes and folded green arms was none other than the Indian plant chief, with his entire tribe lined up behind, two rows in single file, extending all the way out of the door and halfway up the valley.

'Wah! Wah!' the voice of authority yelled in a high pitch. Immediately the entire army began screaming with glass shattering war cries, flapping their spongy green arms over their orifice mouths in obedience to their chief. The Indian plants flooded into the tiny abode by the dozen, while the Chief thrust his arm forward with a scream. The little fiends raised their arrows to the bow in perfect synchronization and fired them at the sitting trunks.

'Get them, Zapache plants!' Azor shrieked, exploding into visibility, and rubbing her hands together with glee.

Several of the little arrows darted the boys' trunks, causing them to gasp in panic. Fortunately all they felt was a slight pinprick as the darts barely pierced their thick bark coverings. One of the arrows zipped towards the corner where Chimzen was standing; he swiftly lashed out his left hand, catching it in mid flight, just before it plunged into his leg. Thanks to Zet's sharp magical ability, the Malco trio altered the shield by projecting a fourth wall of beams through his corner of the pyramid, directly across the path of the oncoming mass of green rebels. The shield was raised in the nick of time, as several front row Indian plants lay sliced open in cross-section halves on either side of the fine deadly shield, with red head petals flapping in all directions like a plucked chicken. The remainder of the tribe marched forward blindly screaming into the defence shield, and became instantaneously silent, with thick mucous cactus sap bubbling into oblivion. The Chief finally came to the

realization that about a quarter of his tribe had quite strangely disappeared into the unusual transparent wall, and decided to use an alternative method of attack.

‘Wah! Wah! Whoh! Wah!’ he bellowed, waving his arms up towards the roof, and frantically shaking his mane of petals, which now looked like a fluffed up chicken approaching the slaughter.

‘Damn you, Malcos, and damn you, Chimzen, too!’ Azor shrieked, waving her hands like a raving lunatic. The other fairies were strangely quiet, kneeling down with their heads dropped over in a state of remorse.

‘They’re moving to plan “B”,’ Chimzen said, hurriedly shifting the boys slightly apart, and forcing himself in between. ‘The Malcos can’t help us anymore; I think they’re coming through the roof.’ Sure enough, the ferns above began shaking like deadly cobras slithering through the reeds. ‘Hold on boys, it’s time to put on a bit of protection.’ Chimzen grinned, taking pleasure in the wild action. At least the boys would have the pleasure of administering a bit of payback for all the torment these Indian plant critters had caused them.

‘Hold my staff Frank!’ he yelled, much to the poor boy’s surprise. Frank clutched at the staff with awkward twiggy hands.

‘Can you aim it towards the roof, Frank?’

‘I th-think so,’ the startled tree boy stammered, pointing the end carefully upwards.

‘Good, then let the fun begin,’ Chimzen said, chuckling as he began a chant:

*‘Great staff, now blasting gun,
Purple flame, sulphur fire like the sun,
Activated by the word “blast”,
These devil plants, a thing of the past.’*

Frank held the staff, trembling like he did when he held a two-point-two rifle for the first time. A blast of magical energy surged up the length of the staff, and he gulped a sticky ball of sap down his trunk gullet in excitement.

‘Not to worry boy, it won’t hurt you. Just remember, if one of them comes through the ferns above, just point it in their direction and shout the magic word, okay?’

‘Yes sir,’ Frank mumbled nervously, clutching the staff with his shaky branches bent at the nodes.

‘Here they come!’ Philip yelled.

‘Blast!’ Frank yelled, pointing the staff at a pair of striped, green-legged intruders dangling through the surrounding ferns. An enormous purple surge erupted from the depths of the staff, almost forcing Frank over backwards. The little unsuspecting

green devil took full impact as well as several other victims attempting to follow suit. The purple surge blasted a hole in the fern ceiling about three feet wide, sending several Indian plants to flower heaven in one blasting instant.

‘Wow wee!’ Frank yelled in delight. ‘Did you see that?’

‘Look out Frank, behind you!’ Philip screamed. Once again Frank yelled the magic word, roasting six more Indian plant goons attempting to make a drop directly over Patroux’s pot. The purple surge was way too powerful for a young boy like Frank to be playing with, but at least it made the odds of an Indian plant armed with tiny arrows having any kind of victory completely impossible.

Most importantly, the boy was having some fun for a change. Philip took his turn, grabbing the staff bazooka with twitching twig fingers. ‘Blast!’ he yelled. The purple surge erupted from the end of Chimzen’s staff, singeing the red head petals off three panic-stricken, screaming Indian plants leaping into the half wrecked dwelling. Six more determined plant critters were blasted in the front corner, with the electrical purple surge rocketing into the sky like Halley’s Comet. In a very short space of time the fern ceiling had been blasted full of gaping holes, which soon fell apart at the seams, leaving behind a trail of scattered fern leaves and Indian plant petals. The boys stared through the open roof at the bright starry sky, their leafy heads rustling with excitement.

‘Get me out of here!’ Azor commanded the few remaining successful Indian plants that were short of red head petals, and skipped about in confusion. The little plants immediately obeyed, dashing courageously towards the Malco prison to save Azor. They clutched at the green lasers in an effort to break through the shield. Instead of releasing the evil captive, they oozed through the deadly bars like grated cheese, turning from bubbling white sap to a temporary bad odour.

Philip aimed the base point of the magic staff towards the entrance like a professional tree sniper, in an effort to blast the Indian plant chief who had been standing there earlier. The Chief had trained his tribe to be patriotic, to fight to the death, but that certainly didn’t mean he had to. When things were starting to get a bit hot, he promptly made a duck, abandoning his entire tribe. After all, what could he have done for them now anyway?

‘And I thought I could depend on you?’ Azor barked, yanking the two Indian arrows from her head, which were used to hold her jasmine vine in a perfect bun arrangement, and dissolving them into the green prison laser shield in fury. With her jasmine head arrangement sprawled around her in twisted sweet-smelling strands, she really did look quite the wicked witch.

* * * * *

‘The Indian plant tribe was her creation,’ Chimzen said unexpectedly.

‘What?’ the boys asked, staring at him in horror.

‘Quite correct. She sent them to attack you in the first place. How do you think the flower fairies knew that you boys were hanging in the trees?’

‘I see what you’re saying, Chimzen, now it all makes sense,’ Philip said with a look of surprise.

‘You see, Azor has been told many stories about earth by Patroux, including ones of Cowboys and Indians. So she decided to manipulate an ordinary cactus plant, and create a whole new devilish race of plant beings, using her streak of creative wickedness. Patroux had always wanted the fairies to be in charge, using his magical powers purely for good. He never expected anything like this though. This planet is evil on the whole, but many creatures here were created by Azor for her own personal benefit. She has created several armies of beastly plants, to ensure that all the others are kept in line. She has dominated Floran with dictatorship rule for many years, and any plant beings that stand in disagreement with her will get their stems slit, and are thrown out roots and all. Well, I suppose any creature from this planet granted so much power would do exactly the same, given their rotten natures. As they say: nothing lasts forever, and this day is most definitely her last.’

‘Dick-ate-her-ship!’ Frank exclaimed, looking rather puzzled. ‘Who is Dick? Where is her ship? And how the hell did he eat it?’

‘What on earth are you talking about, my boy?’ Chimzen blurted out, staring at Frank with eyes bulging in question. ‘Have you gone completely mad, boy? I never said a word about Dick and his ship, never mind eating the blinking thing.’

‘It’s not Dick-ate-her-ship, Frank,’ Philip started, trying his best to subdue a fit of giggles, ‘it’s the Dick-ate-her-ship RULE, which I guess is an enforced rule on Floran to prevent people like ourselves from chopping precious trees down for wood to build ships with, and possibly eating them afterwards just like Dick did.’

‘Oh really?’ Frank stammered, looking more confused than ever.

‘Nonsense, Philip!’ the wizard yelled, rolling sideways with laughter. ‘You are a very cruel boy, Philip, making fun of your friend like that.’

‘I couldn’t help myself Frank, sorry,’ Philip chuckled, his leaves shaking wildly in an effort to subdue his explosive fit of laughter.

‘Okay, okay, very funny!’ Frank barked, starting to smoke under the branches. ‘Now that you’ve all had a good laugh at my expense, what is Dick-ate-her-ship rule then?’

‘To put it in a nutshell,’ Chimzen started, attempting to clear his throat to prevent a further fit of laughing, ‘it’s actually one word, “dictatorship”, which is a leadership that dominates its people with incredible harshness, allowing no freedom of will, and ruling with completely selfish motives. A country under such rule will ultimately end up in starvation and ruin, with its leaders never able to satisfy their endless greed and lust for power.’

‘Oh,’ Frank muttered, glaring at Philip with wood axes in his eyes.

‘We need to get going, boys. I’m sure that pesky Indian chief has gone back to the forest to bring back reinforcements.’

‘What do we do now Chimzen?’ Philip asked.

‘You just wait and see fellows.’ The wizard stood up, using a tree boy on either side to hoist him to his feet, moaning and muttering about the aching sores on his face. He stood in front of the Malco jail with crossed arms, gazing at the flower fairies in anger. Madonna, Paulina and Gallica remained in a kneeling position with their heads hung over in remorse, but Azor stood her ground with vindictive pride, throwing insults and mockery at his magic abilities.

‘Let’s begin with phase number one, Malco trio,’ he commanded, taking one step back, holding a fixed gaze on the fairies like a school principal about to administer a well-deserved beating.

‘Ag cum on mun!’ Paulina cried, looking up at him with genuine fear. ‘We are really surry mun, please dun’t punish us Chimzun mun.’

‘Surry hey,’ Chimzen mimicked, raising one eyebrow, ‘like you were in the past, yet you still persevered in your rebellion. Look at Patroux; he’s sitting in a pot; is this how surry you are? The very man who gave you the lives you now have, is the one you robbed of everything and banished to a pot.’

‘It wus Azor; she munipulated us Chimzen; wat were we supposed ta do mun?’

‘Unfortunately my well of grace has run dry, Paulina dear. The three of you sided with Azor for selfish gain, which puts all of you under the category of accessory to murder.’

Azor continued with her ranting and cursing, hissing at the wizard like a wild cat. She knew her time of domination was over, but she certainly wouldn’t be going down quietly. The other three remained poised with noses pointing to the ground, having made a last attempt at being freed, and seeing quite plainly that there was no way out. They were all as guilty as sin itself; what was there really left for them to say?

The green Malco shield started to glow brightly, increasing the heat inside the pyramid jail to an unbearable temperature. The beams then turned bright yellow, and the flower fairy wings and magnificent flower arrangements began to wilt

under the dazzling exposure. Azor continued to curse Chimzen, even though her eyes reflected a terrible fear. Frank and Philip were horrified when they heard the mournful cries of anguish.

‘You can’t do this, Chimzen, it’s wrong!’ Philip cried, expressing tremendous sorrow for the three beautiful creatures. Much to his shock Chimzen never said a word; he just stood staring with a solemn locked gaze.

Suddenly the four fairies burst into flames with Azor last to erupt into smoke. Much to the boys’ surprise they reappeared as pigs in a pen. The squealing was too terrible as they ran in panic-stricken circles. Soon the heat overwhelmed the Miss Piggies, and a pleasant sizzling breakfast bacon smell filled the air. So they turned into four beastly crocodiles with thick scaly skin able to protect them from the alarming increase in temperature. The boys nearly jumped out of their trunks in fright as the four gigantic snappers displayed endless rows of jagged teeth. The yellow beams grew brighter, intensifying the unbearable heat, until eventually the four crocs couldn’t bear the sun basking any longer, and turned into armadillos with thick armour-plated shells. The armadillos strained under the heat, burnt beyond recognition, and finally turned into hundred-year old tortoises. They slid their wrinkled heads back inside their age old multi-layered shells, desperate to escape the terrible punishment. The shells melted away layer by layer in a matter of seconds, while the Malco oven continued to bake with a vengeance. Finally the fairies turned to copper metal plates, desperate to escape the fierce temperatures.

‘Phase two, Malcos,’ Chimzen said, taking another step back. This time the Malco jail glowed bright blue, generating a magnificent furnace, with the intensity to melt steel and hard ore. The metal melted into a pool of copper liquid, so they turned to mild steel. The mild steel soon blistered on the surface, so they changed to stainless steel, which wasn’t too much of a challenge for the unstoppable trio furnace. The flower fairies didn’t transform into any form of rock mineral, for if they had, there was the possibility that they would explode, and then they would be destroyed forever.

Chimzen had a plan and needed them to transform into something special for him. They knew exactly what he wanted, and they were trying their very best to avoid it at any cost. It was only a matter of time; sooner or later they would have to bow to his wishes.

‘Phase three, Malcos,’ he said, sounding more forceful than he had before. Finally the four fairies turned to solid gold bars. The trio changed the laser shield to bright red at precisely the same time, generating the most unbelievable heat surge inside the pyramid jail. The boys looked at each other, shaking their heads and

looking bewildered.

‘First, it looked like he was going to cremate the four of them,’ Philip said.

‘Now he’s getting rich, making gold bars out of them,’ Frank chuckled.

The red laser shield melted the gold with ease, without allowing the fairies any chance to transform again. The four pools of liquid gold boiled for several minutes, while a thick black muck resembling old car engine oil bubbled to the surface. The black residue trickled over the gold liquid and burst into flame, disappearing into a puff of smouldering black stink.

After Chimzen was satisfied with the glowing puddles of gold he told the trio to run the heat procedure in reverse, returning back to a green laser shield. The puddles soon hardened into solid bars of gold except for Azor; she turned to a slab of dark bronze. The trio gradually changed the heat level from red laser through back to green, and the flower fairies also gradually changed back from gold and bronze, back to flower fairies once again.

Paulina, Madonna and Gallica were kneeling with their heads hanging over as they were before, but Azor was nowhere to be seen.

‘Drop shield,’ Chimzen commanded the trio, much to Philip and Frank’s horror. The flower fairies made no attempt to try and escape, except for Azor. She wriggled towards the cave entrance like a slippery snake, in the form of a jasmine creeper with several tiny sweet-scented flowers, and disappeared out of sight.

‘That is how she was before she became Azor the horrible,’ Chimzen said, shaking his head in disappointment. ‘She was like that in the beginning, and that is what she has been restored to, a creeping flower snake.’

‘Be careful Chimzen, the other fairies might try and escape!’ Philip exclaimed, pointing a twiggy finger towards them in fright.

‘Not to worry boys, they won’t be going anywhere,’ the wizard laughed. ‘Let me inform the two of you about what just happened now. The flower fairies always had the magical ability of turning into whatever they wanted to be, so all that I’ve done to them is I’ve turned up the heat a little bit.’

‘Yes, we can see that alright,’ Philip interrupted indignantly.

‘Wait a minute lad, let me finish. This brief period spent here has been like an eternity for these creatures. Life is very demanding for us as people, with much expected of us if we hope to succeed. During this process we have to confront many obstacles if we wish to grow, and reach maturity. You see, this I believe is the very purpose of life. That we may learn from our mistakes and make better choices the next time we are confronted with similar circumstances. So that when we leave this life our spirits will have matured, and we will be prepared for far greater spiritual

events. What you have witnessed here today is a perfect demonstration of this. Unlike us, the flower fairies have never had to endure hardship, thus they have never been moulded into anything of good character before. Things have always come easy to them, so by resorting to evil they are quite simply doing what they know best, doing what comes easy. Life is a refining process, with many enduring trials along the way, trials which mould us into better people. That is exactly what has just happened here today; the flower fairies were put through a spiritual process of refinement, equivalent to a life of endless tribulation. What you have witnessed here is four Floranian fairy beings, physically and spiritually taken through the fire with the purpose of moulding their characters, separating the gold from all foul impurities. These three fairies have just woken from an endless nightmare of hardship and pain. They are cleansed of impurities and have accepted those things of truth, just as I thought they would. I guess you could say their awakening is like an entrance to heaven. Please do be nice, boys.'

'You're not serious are you, Chimzen?' Frank asked in disbelief.

'Dead serious, my boy.'

'And Azor, what went wrong with her?'

'Well well, Azor is another story altogether. The more trials she went through, the more she resisted them, instead of learning from them. As much as she suffered the consequence incurred by her own selfish pride, her foundation of beliefs was still a garden of weeds. Sad to say, she's a lost cause. I guess she was created to be a flower in the first place for a damned good reason. Other than her sweet smell, she's not really worth all that much to anyone anymore, and never was in the first place.'

Chimzen beckoned the kneeling flower fairies over to his side. Stooping his head down low, he took a good look into their eyes, and stood upright again, beaming with content.

'You can always tell by the eyes; they are the windows to your soul, and these ones speak the truth.'

'Are you God?' Gallica asked, smiling innocently at Chimzen.

'No, not at all, Gallica dear!' the wizard exclaimed, grinning from ear to ear. 'That's far too much responsibility for me to take on, thank you.'

'They battle a bit with memory loss after such a gruelling experience; she will be herself again by tomorrow I'm sure.'

'Not completely herself; I hope,' Frank said.

'No, never lad, her days of deception are over.'

Chapter 23

The stars shone brightly, filling the little abode with a magnificent brightness, which seemed to signify the beginning of a great transformation over the flower planet. The boys gazed through the roofless abode as several fiery shooting stars flew in all directions like a spectacular firework display lighting up the sky. The little flames continued to flicker in obedience to Azor's magic spell, her last and quite ironically her most helpful one as well. Although, with the sky so incredibly bright now they weren't really of much use any longer, just like Azor.

The flower fairies walked shyly towards Frank and Philip, clutching their tiny hands in front with their flowery heads humbly bowed over. Frank hastily lowered his leafy head in fright and shifted closer to Philip, still feeling distrust for the approaching flower creatures.

'Never mind Frank, they are quite harmless,' the wizard chuckled, 'they will restore you again; just accept them.'

'Who are ya mun?' Paulina addressed Frank with genuine childlike innocence.

'What do you mean, who am I?' Frank snapped, backing up in fear. 'You know damned well who I am!'

'Ya I do?'

'Yes, you are the reason that I'm a no good tree, look what you've done to me.'

'I did?'

'Yes, you did, and now you've still got the cheek to play games.'

Frank wasn't exactly the sharpest knife in the drawer when it came to obscure concepts; he was just far too practical to understand the abstractness of transformation and cleansing. Philip was a scruffy mega ruffian, but most of his attitude was only really to cover his own freckled face insecurities. He was quite a sensitive, deep-thinking boy, who possessed a good understanding of change, an understanding of deep heart change. The one thing he definitely knew beyond any shadow of a doubt was that his experience over the last few days had matured him immensely, and he was beginning to understand how precious life really was, and

that he should take more responsibility for his actions in future. Frank had changed, make no mistake, but not quite to the same degree as his friend.

‘Just leave them, Frank,’ Philip interrupted, much to his surprise. ‘Can’t you see they are not the same anymore? Look at their eyes, look at their humility, and look at the peace they seem to radiate.’

‘Have you gone mad, Philip?’

‘Just look!’

Without saying another word the boys sat gazing at the fairies. Frank was a bit reluctant at first, crossing his branches and huffing in frustration. Feeling quite uncomfortable, the fairies stood waiting anxiously under the close scrutiny of the boys. They had no idea where they were; it was like they had woken from a bad dream, and the awakening was like a dream itself. It was very unpleasant standing here under the close inspection of two talking trees and a tall man with a green robe.

‘You’re right, Philip,’ Frank admitted, shaking his leaves. ‘They used to have a black cloud hanging over them; now all I see is a crystal clear sparkle.’

‘Yes exactly Frank,’ Philip agreed. ‘Now look at their eyes.’

The wizard smiled, looking at the boys, while the trio hovered above him in slow-moving circles. Lily Madonna started grinning and the next thing all three of them were seated next to the boys, giggling like mischievous schoolgirls.

The fairies chatted with the tree boys for hours, no longer using seductive tones, only innocent chatter like three intellectual girls. The boys eagerly told their story, informing the fairies of the previous day’s events. After a bit of mental stimulation the flower fairies soon regained their memories and placed all the missing pieces together.

‘Did zwe really do all zat, oui?’ Gallica cried in shock, disgusted by the creature she once was.

‘Then we have to sort things out, my dears, don’t we?’ Madonna said firmly, standing to her feet and fluttering her delicate wings.

‘Why, can you?’ Frank asked, delighted with the thought of being human once again.

‘Af curse we cun mun. Af curse!’ Paulina chirped, waving her hand forward. ‘Piece af cake mun.’

Gallica grabbed the empty wooden bowl originally filled with the chocolate drink poison and wiped it clean with a few scattered fern remains. Then the flower fairies each carefully plucked a cleansed petal from their head arrangements and placed it into the bowl.

‘What zflavour would zyou boys like this time?’ Gallica asked. ‘Zshould zwe make it zchocolate again, oui?’

‘No, definitely not!’ Frank blurted in disgust.

‘Make it pinana,’ Philip said, looking at Frank for approval.

‘Good idea.’

‘Zvery well, pinana zit is oui?’ Gallica said, smiling sweetly.

Lily Madonna took the bowl from Gallica and placed it on the ground, deep in thought over how to word the spell:

*‘Wooden bowl we command you fill,
Sweet pinana juice that brings a thrill,
Blending now with the purest petal,
The sap of tree to blood will settle,
Transformation of the organic being,
Restored to man on earth be seen,
May this curse be broken and no longer hold,
Skin blood and bones their lives unfold.’*

With these words the petals at the base of the wooden vessel began to sizzle into a sticky mass of sap, releasing a sweet yellow liquid, which slowly filled the bowl to the brim. The flower fairies gazed over the bowl of magical pinana juice, beaming with the satisfaction of performing a spell without the help of Azor the horrible. Paulina reached for the magic pinana mix and raised it carefully, handing it to Frank in delight like a little girl making scones for the first time and giving one to her mother for a taste test approval.

Frank edged back, a bit hesitant.

‘Ah, come on Frank,’ Philip chirped, ‘you’re already a tree, how much worse could it possibly get?’

Frank leaned forward, his hands trembling slightly. He took the bowl from Paulina and nervously placed it to his mouth, causing a few drops to splash over the side.

‘Drink it slowly, my dears,’ Madonna said. ‘The reaction the juice will have on your system is very painful; you will need to do it in stages.’

‘To return from a lesser being to a greater being is a big shock to the system, boys,’ Chimzen added. ‘Remember what happened before.’

The boys gasped, remembering the dreadful transformation process from monkeys to humans. Frank sipped the juice slowly and handed it across to Philip with wide eyes. It tasted wonderful and he could have quite easily gulped it all down on his own. Philip wiped his mouth after taking a slurp, and sat waiting anxiously for the unpleasant transformation.

‘Do you mind if I take the bowl for a moment, my dear?’ Madonna asked Philip.

‘S-sure,’ he stammered, looking a bit surprised. Madonna grabbed the pinana remedy and flew across to Patroux’s pot. Very gently, she tipped the bowl, allowing the magic pinana to splash over onto the pot soil. Then she hastily returned the juice and handed it to Frank. Patroux had been sitting very quietly during all the commotion, only able to force a few words in absolute desperation. Azor had held the power over him, filling his multicoloured beak with parrot fashioned nonsense and monotonous rhyming. He was very powerful and she felt the less he spoke the safer it would be for everyone. Even though Lily Madonna had been deceitful at the time, there was always a part of her that felt sincerely sorry for him.

The process was a slow and painful one as the magic juice began to take its toll. Frank could feel an intense burn inside his trunk, while the sap congealed into blood. Philip clutched his trunk belly in pain while the juice slowly seeped into his system.

‘Here, have some more,’ Frank gasped, handing the bowl back to his friend. Rather reluctantly, feeling his roots begin to shrivel and reshape, Philip took another sip.

‘Ouch!’ Frank yelled, clutching his nether regions in agony. It felt as though all his pubic hairs were being yanked out in bunches as the leaves burst back to normal. The leaves on Philip’s head began to shrink, with many floating to the ground like summer turning to autumn.

Frank’s branches pumped with blood so intensely that it felt as though his twiggy hands were being savagely whipped by his school teacher’s ruler.

‘It’s nearly over boys,’ Chimzen encouraged, ‘just hang in there, it won’t be long now.’

Quite suddenly the pot in the corner started making groaning noises like an ogre in a deep sleep awakened by a solid clubbing to the head. The plant pot shattered into a thousand pieces, sending the parrot plant hurtling off the ledge onto the ground below. Its stem swelled up like a plant on steroids and it wriggled about like a thick twisting snake. The multicoloured plant beak swelled to double its size, rippling and boiling like a scientific experiment gone wrong. The stem sprouted two long shoots towards the top and two more at the base which sprung out into thick elongated green extensions. The result was an enormous green stick man like the ones drawn by a five year old, complete with an oversized colourful head. The chemical reaction continued with its work, rippling through the cartoon creature in animated convulsions. Soon the texture lightened to a transparent green, while the thick elongated protrusions sprouted five hideous stubs on each. The

stubs lengthened into perfectly defined toes and fingers with human skin and tiny hair follicles. The head no longer resembled a giant all day lollypop, instead it had all the features of a regular human being, someone with hardly any hair on their head, but a human being nonetheless.

Frank and Philip couldn't care less what was happening in the corner; they both felt like they were giving birth to a baby tree, and were struggling to push the baby's roots out at that moment.

Frank's fingers popped back into existence. It felt more like he had had them blown off with a hand grenade they hurt so much. He examined them carefully to make sure that they were all still there after the little incident with Azor earlier on. Much to his relief his boxing hands were as good as new.

Philip clutched his cheeks which felt as if they were on fire, definitely a lot worse than any sunburn he had experienced before. The thick sap turned back to blood, burning through his vessels like liquid fire. His grotesque old age face filled slowly with human blood, and although rather agonizing, his woody texture returned to soft skin tissue.

During all the healing and restoring going on the trio noticed Chimzen's discomfort with all the stinging sores and slash marks on his body and decided to do a bit of restoration of their own. Much to Zip's delight and to the general satisfaction of the other Malco balls, they set about demonstrating a bit of healing magic of their own to the flower fairies.

The trio spun into action, administering laser treatment to their master's nasty wounds, weaving in and out, knitting the torn flesh with perfect precision and accuracy. The tissue cells responded to the fine laser beams, with the magical heat therapy stimulating the cells to rapidly regenerate and heal the wounds.

After much frustration and terrible agony Philip and Frank were fully restored to human beings for the second time. They both sat huddled together stark naked and flushed red with embarrassment. The flower fairies tried not to look at them, but couldn't help giggling amongst themselves; it really was a funny sight. Then after a very long minute or so their clothes reappeared in a magical flash. Just as before, they sat fully dressed in their filthy tattered school outfits.

'Sorry my darlings,' Madonna said, holding her mouth to disguise a bursting grin, 'you drank the magic pinana so slowly that unfortunately your clothes took a while to respond to the potion. Never mind my darlings, as long as all the bits and pieces are well covered now just like they ought to be.'

* * * * *

‘What! Who’s that?’ Frank exclaimed, looking to his right and shifting back in fright.

‘Oh my golly goodness, what’s all this sticky stuff on my face?’ Patroux asked, fumbling with his ears like a small child waking up from a disturbing dream. His black thick rimmed spectacles were covered in sticky plant sap, and dangled from the end of his nose, while he peeked blankly over the top like a bewildered blind man.

‘Darling Patroux, you are back!’ Madonna exclaimed. All three flower fairies flew towards him and embraced him fondly like a long lost father. The startled Druid shifted hastily backwards, groping at the soil in fright.

‘Get back you murdering devils!’ he squealed, sounding like a pig lined up for the slaughter. The flower fairies stepped back in fright, looking a bit confused by his desperate outburst.

‘Just give the poor man a chance to regain his senses, ladies; the transformation has been a bit of a shock to the old boy. He just needs a bit of time to pull his human self together,’ Chimzen said, stepping closer. ‘The fairies have changed their ways, Patroux; there is no need for you to worry yourself any longer, they won’t harm you.’

‘Chimzen, my dear friend, it’s so good to see you.’ He adjusted his sticky spectacles in an attempt to see his wizard friend better. ‘What a nightmare it’s been; years and years of absolute torment.’

‘Yes indeed, it must feel good to be a man again.’

‘A man?’ Frank whispered to Philip, looking over the peculiar looking Druid. ‘Now I see why he loves fairies and flowers so much; he’s a blinking fairy himself. Look at how he’s dressed and listen to his girly voice.’

‘Yes, he does look rather queer, doesn’t he?’ Philip joked.

‘Dressed up all gay and pansy with that flowery get up.’

Patroux was a feminine character with a high-pitched voice and ladylike manner. He wore a brightly coloured floral robe with a pair of brown felt shoes, each one painted with a large daisy down to the toe. He had an unusually large, almost bald, head with thick tufts of greyish black hair sprouting from the sides, which overhung his unusually large pointed ears.

‘That head of his must contain heaps of brains, Frank, just look at the size.’

‘Yip, he looks like a bit of a reject from society, doesn’t he?’

‘I guess that’s why he’s here; earth didn’t want him around anymore.’

Chimzen made a loud throat clearing sound to get the boys’ attention. He

crossed his arms and frowned at them. 'Have you boys got something you would like to say, perhaps?'

'No-er, sorry sir we were just talking about going home,' Philip lied, sounding a bit shaken.

'Very well, my boy, just make sure that your nose doesn't start growing.'

'Yes sir,' Frank answered, red with embarrassment.

'Who are these fine looking boys Chimzen dear?' Patroux asked, turning to face them with glee. He fumbled with his fingers like a lady eager to share the latest gossip with friends at a tea party, and beamed at them, creating an atmosphere of awkward discomfort. The wizard introduced Frank and Philip to the blossoming Druid, much to his delight.

'I'm the one that hit you with the grapple,' Frank boasted, flashing Philip with a wink of deceit, and whispering slyly into his ear, 'and I'm really not sorry I did it either.'

Patroux looked suddenly confused and lost in thought.

'Ah yes, now I remember!' he exclaimed, waving his finger about like an enthusiastic music instructor. 'Azor turned the pair of you into trees; then Chimzen transformed the fairies into decent beings. Oh yes, now it's all coming back to me.'

He turned to face the flower fairies in delight, holding his arms out to embrace them like a father would his long lost children. Patroux was a gentle, kind-hearted, forgiving man and even though he had suffered many years of torment as a result of their greed, he accepted his creations without even a second thought.

'Zwe love zyou, master,' Gallica spoke sincerely, stroking his bald head with her tiny hand.

'I love you too,' he said, with tears of joy spilling down his rosy cheeks.

Frank and Philip looked at each other and were beginning to feel a bit uncomfortable about the comments they had made earlier on. As unusual as this man was, he possessed a heart of solid gold.

'I guess I trusted too much, giving Azor the power I did,' Patroux said, still feeling heart-sore over her bitter ending nonetheless.

'You gave her everything, yet she was never content,' Chimzen said. 'Greed is sadly very destructive my friend; sooner or later the wheel does a full turn and people have to pay for their sins.'

'I just can't understand how anyone can be like that; it just makes no sense to me, Chimzen.'

'Never mind Patroux; justice is always served sooner or later and it's never a pleasant affair. You have wandered Floran for twenty painful years, and as a

just reward, you and your magnificent creations are given free reign over her. The wheel has turned your way this time; the positive seed you have sown for all these years shall bloom into a harvest of good things for you. I admit, it's an enormous responsibility for you to take on, my friend, a responsibility which I believe you are well equipped for, with your toils and suffering moulding you into the character you are this day. The flower fairies have all your magic abilities at hand, enabling them to work hand in hand with you to make this a constantly changing flower paradise for you and its inhabitants. They have stood the test and are ready to go out there and make a difference. It's all in your hands, my old boy, go out there and make a difference; I have no doubt you will.'

'I-It's a dream come true,' Patroux stammered, finding it all very hard to swallow. 'Thank you, Chimzen, thank you.'

'No need to thank me, my friend, you are the one that paid the price; this is your just reward demonstrated by the greatest sacrifice of all, the sacrifice of love.'

Frank sat staring as if in a trance. He had been touched in a place very few people could reach. He had always been the popular kid on the block, the one that always succeeded in most things. He had always picked on others weaker than himself to cover his own insecurities, and beaten on others who had criticised him in any way.

Today he had learnt to respect people with weaknesses, realizing that it wasn't the outward appearance that mattered; instead it was the nature of the person's heart that showed their worth. This was a real turning point for the boy, a transition of the heart. From that time onwards he would look a bit closer before he passed judgement over anyone. This moment in Frank's life had nothing to do with magic as such, only a shifting of spirit in the dawning of life's truth.

The flower fairies left the little abode shortly afterwards, while the group told Patroux all about their dangerous journey in search of the magic Frego flower. What happened to Chimzen and the boys didn't come close to what Patroux had had to battle through over the years.

The fairies returned after a while with three sweetly-scented cakes of soap. They had collected a few natural essentials and placed them together to magically produce the three flowery bars. Rose, violet and lily scented, of course.

'Ag me be tinkin dat ya all be smelling kinda disgusten mun, and dat ya'll be needing a buth. Look, master, Patroux is horrible sticky mun,' Paulina chuckled, flying over to him and handing him the violet soap. 'Just like da Nigeriuns mun, dey all be stinking like dat.'

'Like she's actually ever been there,' Patroux commented, raising a bushy

eyebrow with a grin. The flower fairies had such a warm way about them, completely different to the way they were before; everyone found it pleasantly strange.

‘Bathing by ze moonlight, oui?’ Gallica asked. ‘Quite ze perfect thing to do on such ze starry night.’

‘You’ve got to be kidding?’ Philip exclaimed. ‘We’ll all get drowned!’

‘Definitely not while we’re around, my dear boy,’ Madonna said firmly. ‘The Goza weed is at our beck and call; sorry you had to go through all that yesterday darling. It won’t happen again, I assure you.’

‘I dunno, I’m...’

‘Don’t worry Philip, you’ll be fine,’ Chimzen reassured. ‘The Malcos are here, anyway. You don’t want to go home smelling like old tree, do you?’

After stuffing their faces with fruit, the party set off down to the river. The place was tranquil and the moonlight reflected off the water like a splendid magical white light, with the water lapping softly against the muddy river bed. The air seemed to carry a sense of peace about it, like the dawning of a whole new era, truly magnificent.

Everyone splashed about wearing only their underwear, scrubbing all over with the lovely soap. Frank and Philip were still feeling a bit paranoid, constantly checking their feet to see if any strands were trying to attach themselves. The fairies joined in on the splashing fun, and a grand time was had by all. As for the Goza weeds, they disappeared in fear for their lives, petrified by the pure and unfamiliar power contaminating the water. The trio hovered over the splashing party, without bothering to add any extra light. The stars and moon shone so brightly that the river already looked like a well-lit sports stadium.

‘Okay boys, I think it’s time we were off,’ Chimzen said, drip-drying at the side of the riverbank. ‘Your parents must be sick with worry.’

‘For sure!’ they both exclaimed, feeling strangely disappointed.

‘You know, Chimzen, this is quite sad,’ Philip said. ‘This place is all violets and roses for the first time we have been here.’

‘And lilies,’ Lily Madonna added.

‘Yes, lilies too, but now we have to leave again.’

‘Who knows, we might return again some day,’ Chimzen said, almost biting his tongue to gulp the words back.

‘Really?’ Frank asked, splashing around in excitement.

‘Well, we’ll see,’ Chimzen answered, giving Frank a wink.

Everyone stood dripping wet on the riverbank, waiting for the warm night air to do its work. Suddenly the flower fairies flew out of the water, flapping their

transparent wings at an incredible speed. They sounded like a swarm of angry bees as they flew across to the dripping party. They turned their fairy backs, hovering motionless while flapping their wings at a rapid speed. The fairy wing fans worked like a sophisticated airconditioner, leaving the group standing bone dry in a matter of seconds.

The party walked over to an open clearing to prepare for the journey home. While he walked Chimzen had his arm around Patroux, who was all beams and smiles, yet felt deeply saddened to see him go.

The fairies chatted with the boys while they walked, zipping in between them and having a good laugh.

‘I’m really sorry we have to go now, Frank,’ Philip said, sounding rather gloomy. ‘How do you feel?’

‘It’s going to be really strange I must admit; it feels like we’ve been here for a lifetime.’

‘It does, doesn’t it?’

‘I also wish we could stay a bit longer.’

‘Who knows, Frank, Chimzen did say he might bring us back here some day.’

‘Who knows, Birch, maybe we will come back,’ Frank teased, ruffling Philip’s untidy red hair.

Sadly, the three travellers said their goodbyes and stood back to back in teleport position. It was a nice feeling to be heading home again, and ultimately much to everyone’s relief.

‘Okay Malcos, let’s be off!’ Chimzen bellowed, taking one last gaze at the fiery starlit sky. The trio spun around the three, eager to finally launch home. Once they had coordinated their exact positions Chimzen produced the blue earth planet ball from his pocket. Muttering something under his breath he flicked it into the air. The little representation of planet earth hovered slightly above while he waved his staff in the air, and chanted the teleport rhyme out loud:

*‘Dre jitle sales op kanijal firth!
Three little balls of magical birth!
Kestore es trow op slanep aarde!
Restore us now to planet earth!’*

The trio lined themselves up next to the small blue planet and shortly disappeared.

The flower fairies and Patroux waved goodbye, looking a bit tearful. The boys were feeling excited and sad all at the same time, which made the whole goodbye experience rather confusing. The little group slowly disintegrated until all three

finally vanished into thin air. Patroux and the flower fairies waved one last goodbye, left behind with the responsibility of an entire planet to rule.

* * * * *

Beady eyes peered out from behind a nearby rock. The Indian plant chief's thick stem quivered and his multicoloured headdress rustled like a rooster awaiting the slaughter. For the first time ever, the plant chief looked genuinely petrified. Even the loss of his entire tribe had not upset him as much as this. The sudden realization that he would be all on his own from then on cast a dark shadow over his position of dominant authority.

Now that their friends were gone, Patroux and his transformed fairy friends walked back towards the forest with saddened hearts. They hoped to see them again soon; they would certainly be missed.

The creepy Jasmine vine slithered over the Indian Chief's shoulder and around his stem like a bullet belt designed for a toy gun. She slid to the ground, hissing and spitting like a scalded cat, and disappeared between the rocks blooming with jealousy and hate.

As for the plant chief, he took off across the opening with his stem between his legs like a convict trying to escape a pack of sniffing bloodhounds. Being the coward he was, he needed to avoid any unnecessary confrontation just in case it may have affected his good health in any way. Being all by himself, without a single tribe member remaining, he must make his escape.

Not a single "Whih" command trumpeted from his orifice mouth. In fact, the only "whih" sound coming from him was the trickling "whih" running down his green legs.

Chapter 24

The oversized blue denims flapped about in the breeze, brushing the barren soil up in small clouds of dust. The wicked wizard stood his ground like a sheriff from an old time western movie coordinating his men in battle, up against a group of trigger happy cowboys. He gazed up at Chimzen's shielded tree house, on guard, ready to eliminate the grand master in a confrontation duel of magic always to be remembered. The late afternoon sun glistened off Mathias's mucky yellow teeth and his blue streaked hair slapped softly against his grubby "M" tattooed cheek.

* * * * *

'We're home! We're home!' the boys cried in delight, slapping each other a high five. At last, they were finally home. At last!

Chimzen watched them jump up and down in excitement, and felt pleased that their mission had been a success.

'No more monkey business from now on boys,' he joked, giving them each a firm pat on the back.

After a few minutes of excited chatter, he glanced forward and noticed Elvis standing on his little corner platform. The little fish made deep foghorn sounding throat clearing noises and bounced up and down on his fin like a ballerina. All the attention going around with him not having any part of it was totally unacceptable.

'Elvis!' Chimzen exclaimed, his face lighting up with a big smile.

'I thought you had forgotten about me master,' he said, looking very solemn even for a goldfish. 'Now that you have these boys to keep you company, you don't need me anymore. Is that how it is?'

'Don't be silly Elvis!' Chimzen answered, without paying too much attention. 'You are beginning to sound like a grumpy old lady.'

The truth of the matter was, Elvis had a very short term memory, and had

completely forgotten that the entire rescue mission had ever taken place. His little mind was very much like a sieve, and after two hours or so, all recent events had gone straight out the fish tank, completely forgotten. After much explaining and a palm full of crumbles later, he was as content as any fish in water could be. He even had the privilege of singing a song to the boys, which he insisted was the first.

The little fish cleared his throat again with glass shattering vigour.

‘I’m not your stage supervisor Elvis,’ Chimzen rapped sternly. ‘All you have to do is ask.’

‘S-sorry master,’ he quavered. ‘Please can I have my outfit, master?’

‘That’s better. No use damaging that precious magical voice of yours with that unnecessary throat clearing noise you’re making.’ Chimzen produced his little guitar as well as a tiny outfit from his desk drawer. It was a tiny beige cape with a long thick collar, set with an array of tiny stars and moon sequins.

‘Here we go, an outfit custom made for “The King”.’

Elvis thanked him shyly, then proceeded to clear his throat once again, quickly reducing the sound to a soft croak. The group watched while he shuffled his little cape with his fins, taking his sweet time to arrange the sparkling outfit to perfection.

‘Come on Elvis, we don’t have all day,’ Frank said, sounding a little impatient. With that comment, the little goldfish grabbed his guitar and adjusted his fins to get a good feel for the strings, and promptly burst into song:

‘Goldfish say, only sharks rush in,
But I can’t help falling in love with the great big blue,
As the river runs, surely to the sea,
For some fish, that was never meant to be,
Take my fins, take my gills, and my fat fish lips too,
But I can’t help falling in love with fish food, er- sorry, I mean with the big blue.’

‘It’s “Fools rush in”, you fool, not sharks,’ Philip joked, tapping him softly on the gills.

Philip’s father had the classic song as part of his LP collection, and the boy had heard the original version on more than one occasion.

‘Well,’ Elvis began, tugging his collar for a lengthy moment. ‘Sharks are fools.’

‘No, not really, you know, they are actually pretty smart.’

The goldfish racked his tiny brain for several moments then replied smartly, ‘A shark would eat me, wouldn’t it?’

‘Definitely!’

‘Now that’s not so smart, don’t you think?’

‘Okay then, I had best get going,’ Chimzen interrupted, looking strangely solemn. ‘I have something to deal with before dark, and you boys need to get back home; your parents must be sick with worry.’

‘What is it that you need to deal with, Chimzen?’ Frank asked.

‘My cousin,’ he answered abruptly, breathing a sigh of despair.

‘Please can we come with you?’ Philip begged.

‘It’s far too dangerous, lad, and I can’t afford to have any of you get hurt so late in the game. We have come a long way and I am in no position to tempt fate.’

‘But he is the very reason that we are here in the first place, Chimzen,’ Frank stated.

‘And what exactly is that supposed to mean, boy?’

‘Well sir, how can you take the pleasure of being part of the final confrontation away from us after all that we have managed to overcome?’

‘Have you gone completely insane?’ Chimzen stepped forward locking his fiery blue eyes with Frank’s and frowned at him as if he were a guilty suspect. Frank backed off, a bit fearful of the wizard’s bold presence. ‘There is no pleasure in war; how can you say such a thing?’

The room was filled with an awkward silence. He sat at his desk rapping his fingers, and stared at the floor in silence. The trio were in their usual place, hovering peacefully above the big round table, coasting in between the planets as if they were a part thereof.

‘Have some lemonade,’ he offered, gesturing towards the round table. The boys were feeling quite parched, and completely exhausted. They edged towards the table and slowly pulled out a chair, half expecting the wizard to leap up from his desk and bite them. The lemonade was ice cold and fizzy and the boys drank it up like sweet honey from heaven. They were becoming quite accustomed to this magical world, and didn’t even think to question how the lemonade had arrived there in the first place.

As for Elvis, he had sensed the cold vibrations of the room and was resting safely in the comfort of his little fish home. Chimzen continued tapping his fingers on the desk, lost in thought.

‘W-Would you like some lemonade?’ Frank offered him shyly.

‘You boys can come with if you like,’ he muttered, still hovering in two minds.

‘Excuse me?’ Frank strained his head over the table with his hand cupped around his ear like an old man with a hearing aid.

‘I said – you boys can come with me!’

‘Really!’ they both cried, looking at him in surprise.

‘Yes,’ he muttered again. ‘And hand me some lemonade before you both polish it all off.’

Mathias was his cousin after all, and even though he was a treacherous man Chimzen loved him all the same. The idea of administering punishment in any way caused his heart pain. ‘I must be getting soft in my old age,’ he thought. He also began to realize that the boys deserved to be a part of the final confrontation thing. Almost like witnesses at a court hearing, there to see that justice was served. Being the victims, they most definitely deserved to see Mathias suffer the consequences of his actions. Chimzen didn’t personally agree with the idea though; he was more of a *turn the other cheek kind of wizard*. And that is exactly what he intended doing: look away and allow Mathias to dig his own grave.

Chapter 25

The tree house laser shield had been dropped, allowing Squidget passage in through the little window. He was jabbering ten-to-the-dozen with his tail standing up on end like a well used toothbrush.

‘Stop stressing, Squidget, you’ll end up bouncing through the roof with that magic ointment on your feet.’

‘Yes, I know master, but...’

‘No buts about it my friend. We know he’s waiting, and we know that the woods have already been half destroyed. If you would stop carrying on like a gibbering idiot for the moment, we could get down there and sort him out before it gets too dark outside.’

‘Sort him out, y-you mean you are going to sort him out!’ Squidget chattered.

‘Yes, just like I said.’

‘Oh well, okay then.’ He bounced to a steady vibrating standstill, checking from left to right as if unsure of exactly what to do next.

‘Bye-bye squirrel.’ Chimzen waved, then shooed the fluffy creature out of the window.

‘But, but...’

‘No buts, Squidget!’ everyone cried out in song. The squirrel glanced quickly from left to right, worked up a bit of a bounce, and shot out of the window screaming in delight.

‘That squirrel can get a bit much sometimes,’ Chimzen sighed, exhausted from his seemingly endless journey.

‘Okay boys, are you ready then?’

‘Yes sir!’

‘Don’t forget, whatever you do, don’t take any chances with this man; stick to my side like glue. Is that clear?’

‘Yes sir!’

‘Don’t ever underestimate my cousin’s cunning ability. Mathias is a very clever man.’

‘Yes sir!’

‘And stop “yes sirring” me for goodness sake; I’m not a Captain in the army.’

‘Yes s...,’ the boys started, overwhelmed by the exhilaration that came attached to their final confrontation.

‘Trio prepare for teleport!’

‘Yes sir!’ The silver balls giggled amongst themselves like three naughty children.

The three stood in their usual teleport stance, while the Malco balls whizzed around them to plot a precise teleport position. Speedily they flew out through the window, and scanned the terrain below to spot Mathias’s exact location.

‘There he is,’ Zip squeaked, spotting him pacing back and forth in frustration near his roofless dwelling hole.

They landed nearby, watching carefully to make sure that he hadn’t spotted them. A few moments later the teleport pyramid was formed, and the group appeared not very far off from Mathias’s dusty turned back.

* * * * *

Chimzen stood calmly with a schoolboy clutching him on either side.

‘There’s no need to fear, boys,’ he reassured, winking and nudging them to the side. ‘You will be quite safe with me.’

They felt comforted by his bold reassurance and wizardly confidence, and stepped away feeling slightly more relaxed.

‘Mathias!’ Chimzen rapped.

The dark wizard stopped dead in his tracks, and paused momentarily. Then he turned to face Chimzen with a sinister smirk slanted across his face.

‘My darling cousin, how very pleasant to see you again,’ he welcomed with a note of sarcasm in his voice.

‘I wish I could say the same, Mathias,’ Chimzen spoke solemnly, locking his gaze in preparation for a deadly duel.

‘I see you have had much success with the restoration of my priceless pet projects.’

‘Your pet projects?’

‘Yes MY pet projects. The ones YOU stole from ME; remember. MY projects, MY belongings, YOU stole from me!’

‘I stole from you?’ Chimzen asked calmly, taking deep breaths to control his welling rage.

‘Have you gone deaf? What part of stealing don’t you understand, my self-righteous-holier-than-thou cousin? Nothing but a common thief, that’s what you are. A good for nothing common thief.’

‘Look at this place, just look at it!’ he ranted, waving his hands at the barren soil like a raving lunatic. ‘And it’s all your fault!’ He pointed a filthy talon at Chimzen in condemnation.

‘How do you figure that, Mathias?’ Chimzen responded looking, surprisingly, very relaxed.

Frank and Philip watched them while they argued, or should I say, while Mathias argued. Their stomachs were twisted in knots, and the evil wizard’s ranting caused waves of terror to ripple down their spines.

‘His bark is worse than his bite,’ Chimzen whispered, ‘don’t let him see that you are afraid.’

‘I’m talking to you, dammit!’ Mathias roared, almost tearing his blue streaked hair out at the roots, ‘what’s this, a private picnic or something?’

‘Sorry, did you say something?’ Chimzen asked politely, resuming focus on his fuming relative.

‘This mess is your fault, I said!’ he repeated more urgently, advancing towards Chimzen like a hyena about to steal from a lion’s lunch. The ordeal was starting to make him squirm about like a worm on a hot plate, attracted by the warmth of sweet revenge, yet unable to handle the slow rising heat. ‘If you hadn’t stolen what belonged to me in the first place, I would never have sought my revenge on you. Now my precious underground home is ruined, and it’s all your fault.’

Chimzen stroked his beard and gazed upwards, pretending to be lost in thought. Then he returned his condescending stare and said, ‘And since when did they become your property?’

All the questions were only infuriating Mathias all the more. He was starting to behave like a child born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Never taught love through firm discipline. With no self-respect or respect for others. He was always right, and could not be taught anything because he already knew it all. And that is exactly who he was: a spoilt rotten child, now a grown man contaminating the lives of others.

‘Like the rotten stench drifting from a witch’s brew,
Hatred contaminates the air of love in you.’

The ranting wizard was only a couple of footsteps away, and the boys caught a

whiff of his putrid breath. His foul smelling odour flooded their noses, and reminded them of the terrifying monkey transformation that took place in his underground den. They shrank down in fear and hastily paced back a couple of steps. As for Chimzen, he didn't even blink. Instead, he held a firm stare, stood firmly in position, and answered everything that his wicked cousin spat at him with another question.

Mathias knew that he was incredibly powerful, but being the know-it-all that he was, he would do his utmost to take the victory that day, and finally destroy his meddlesome cousin once and for all.

Then quite unexpectedly he leapt forward, grabbing Frank in a high tackle, and took off into the air like a B52 bomber plane, yelling at the top of his voice. 'This is my property, and now I'm taking it back!'

Frank had a nasty fright when he was suddenly whipped up into the air. He was unable to grasp what had just happened, and flew alongside Mathias in stunned silence. He held onto him firmly like a sky diver taking a first jump with the aid of a professional. He could feel Mathias's belly shaking on his as he broke into a fit of hysterical laughter. A few seconds later Frank became irrational with panic, and tried to pry himself free from the talon grip.

'Stop struggling, boy!' Mathias demanded, gnashing his teeth together. 'If you misbehave, I will just have to let you go, and I'm quite sure that you wouldn't like that very much, now would you? From this height you will splat open on the ground like a rotten egg.'

Chimzen's heart pounded in fright. His face had suddenly turned pale. He stared after them in frantic disbelief. He shook his head to snap back to the reality of the situation, and immediately commanded the trio to catch them before it was too late. Mathias made a wide turn, and flew past them in a low swooping circle, cackling at Chimzen like a hyena. Then he headed speedily towards the outer perimeter in an attempt to exit the woods.

But the Malco trio were snappy silver, and they spun after him like greased lightning. Frank decided to stop struggling after having visualised his splattered remains lying on the ground beneath. The trio had the two surrounded in a matter of seconds, and hastily enclosed them in a yellow triangular pyramid, with the same solid surface as the one projected to form a hoverboard. They would have quite gladly used deadly laser walls to capture the conniving troll, but they had to bear Frank's safety in mind. The Malcos were creatures of light, and the pyramid reflected a bright luminous yellow on the inside.

'Damn you, goon-balls!' Mathias roared, slamming into the solid Malco wall at a dangerous speed, and crashing to the base in head exploding agony. An

unsuspecting Frank never banged his head at all, since he was clutching Mathias lower down his body at the waist; instead, he had the pleasure of Mathias dropping on top of him like a sack of rotten potatoes.

‘Sorry Frank,’ Zip squeaked, ‘but there was unfortunately absolutely no other way of doing this.’

‘Shnot-a-sprobem,’ Frank moaned, suffocated by the enormous stinking lump.

Mathias clutched his head, groaning and muttering to himself in agony.

‘Getsh offsh me,’ he complained, struggling to force the wizard monster over to one side. Frank gasped for air, while Mathias let out a blood-curdling yell. The goon wizard had rolled over to one side and bashed his head on the adjoining pyramid wall.

‘Damn you, Malco-Maniac-silver-toffee-nose-blinking-balls!’

‘Do you think he’s upset, Zen?’ Zip joked.

‘Maybe just a little,’ Zen replied, holding back the giggles.

Mathias stood to his feet still holding his head with one hand, cursing the trio’s very existence in a wild fit of slandering. Frank was still gasping for precious oxygen, and was brutally shoved to one side of the Malco prism by a smelly leather shoe.

‘You will pay for this, you will pay with your mercury silver lives,’ Mathias ranted, ignoring the sharp stabbing pain on his head while he fumbled frantically to open the brass button on his jeans.

He finally unfastened the button and slipped his hand into his flying trousers. It appeared almost as though a cockroach or a biting insect had been nibbling at his privates, the way he fidgeted about in his drawers in sheer desperation.

‘Aha, there you are!’ he cackled with glee, wiping his filthy hair back over his head like a well used floor mop. ‘Now you will pay!’

He suddenly retrieved the famous pistol loaded with yellow goo, and aimed it down towards Zen and promptly fired it at the unsuspecting ball like a trigger-happy maniac. He only hoped to destroy the entire trio in three swift squirts, but being a bit disoriented, he never realized that he had been transported back to Chimzen’s feet already.

‘Trapdoor release!’ Zen yelled. The pyramid floor promptly disappeared, and the trio launched upwards like a shuttlecock on steroids, and immediately disengaged. The wicked wizard, Frank, and the blasted yellow goo all landed in a heap right at Chimzen’s feet. Fortunately they were only a couple of feet from the ground, so when they hit the dirt, they caught more of a fright than anything else.

‘Good to see you back, cousin,’ Chimzen remarked, not looking in the slightest

bit concerned. 'Are you alright, Frank? You look a bit shaken, boy.'

Frank lay in a pile of soft sand, and stared at Chimzen, looking very disorientated.

'Go to blazes conniving cousin!' Mathias roared, welling up with bitter hatred. 'You, my experiment you stole, and your silver taxi brigade can all go to hell as far as I'm concerned!'

And with those words he tossed the goo pistol into the air like a baby throwing an unwanted dummy out of a pram. Unfortunately for Mathias his baggy flying jeans weren't fastened all that well, and the button popped open from all the frantic squabbling, causing them to drop down to his ankles. His tucked in robe remained plastered to his belly with stale body sweat, and his pink spotted yellow boxer shorts were on full display for the whole world to see.

Chimzen didn't look quite so serious anymore; in fact he and the boys were all laughing their heads off.

Mathias didn't find it all that amusing though. His blood pressure soared to a dangerous level, and his head was throbbing even worse than it had before. Outraged, he quickly pulled up his magic jeans and flew off into the sunset.

* * * * *

The trio hovered quietly above Chimzen's head, spinning around in a peaceful circle as if nothing had even happened.

'Let's hope that he never comes back again Chimzen,' Frank said, sighing with relief, and dusting his clothes.

'He'll be back, don't you worry.'

'Now I see why you didn't want us to come along,' Frank said, looking a bit pale and worn out. 'I nearly died of heart failure.'

'When do you think he will be back?' Philip asked, his voice sounding a bit shaky.

'Now.'

'Now!' Frank moaned. 'You can't be serious?'

'Dead serious, my boy. You wanted to be a part of the action, now you will have to see it through.'

'Well, alright,' Frank grumbled, looking very weary.

'How can you be so sure, sir?' Philip asked.

'Well, my boy, let's put it like this: When you are very angry with someone – let's say you are having an argument with them, and you feel all out to settle the score – would you be able to just walk away and disappear into the sunset?'

‘Definitely not!’ Frank interrupted, a bit hot under the collar. ‘I would want to box their ears warmly for them.’

‘Exactly!’

‘I see what you mean Chimzen,’ Philip acknowledged.

‘The one thing I believe,’ Chimzen started, gazing across the level terrain on guard for Mathias’s sudden return, ‘is that a man is only as big as his temper. Look at my cousin for example; how big a man do you think he is?’

Those words hit Frank right in the heart. He really had to do something about his own terrible temper that he himself possessed. He had to admit, Mathias wasn’t exactly the kind of person he would like to turn out to be one day.

Sure enough, the silhouette of a beastly wizard loomed in the sunset up ahead. Mathias swooped towards them like a black witch on a turbo charged broomstick, homing in for the kill.

Chimzen stood his ground, commanding the boys to step back.

‘Well, well, I guess it’s time for some serious monkey business this time,’ Mathias cackled, and began chanting his life altering rhyme:

‘Kue rare bot to kestaperance te lange!

You are about to experience a change!

Trest tra pollep see ecto lunkees!

Three people transformed into monkeys!’

While he chanted his potent spell, he produced a small bottle of steaming pink liquid. He slowed down, hovering closer to the three, his face exploding with glee.

‘This is too easy, you silly baboons!’ he roared, squirting the pink liquid over them like a miniature crop duster spraying the field.

‘Do something Chimzen!’ Philip screamed, observing the fine pink liquid squirting through the air.

‘What sort of a fool do you take me for, my boy?’ Chimzen smiled, and winked at the two terrified boys standing behind.

‘Oh no, not again!’ Frank yelled, thinking for a moment that Chimzen had lost all his senses.

* * * * *

Then, quite strangely, the pink monkey spray mist seemed to strike an invisible force field that surrounded the three and bounced right back up towards the unsuspecting Mathias.

The evil wizard groped his dampened garments in horror, and quickly glanced up at the clear blue sky to see if, by some freak chance, any sudden rain had fallen.

‘No, this can’t be,’ he yelled, noticing his hands were covered with a pink residue. A moment later tufts of thick hair started to sprout from his palms and face. It felt as though his jeans had suddenly grown ten times their usual size, while in fact, he was the one shrinking.

‘Damn you, Chimzen!’ he yelled, realizing that all his spells and curses were suddenly backfiring. His thick mop of blue streaked hair suddenly exploded into short tufts of mottled brown hair, and his hands and feet rapidly shrank and formed the shape of those of a tiny monkey. His clothes suddenly exploded into thin air as he plummeted to the ground. He clutched at the air like a silly baboon trying to catch annoying flies in mid flight. He landed on his monkey butt with a thump, unable to use his newly formed limbs that were still in shock as a result of the life changing process in progress. He turned to face Chimzen and the boys, his face a picture of pain and absolute terror. Chimzen stood watching with folded arms, while the pink monkey liquid completed the transformation process with all the finishing touches that a monkey required.

‘The monkey’s little face was pale with shock, and his long tail waved in front like a hissing snake. The signature “M” tattoo remained on his cheek, and one long blue stripe ran down the length of his furry body.

‘Wow Chimzen!’ Frank marvelled at his incredible power, ‘how did you do that?’

‘What’s that “M” on his cheek for now?’ Philip interrupted, pointing at Mathias in condemnation.

‘Monkey I guess,’ Frank joked.

‘Murderer,’ Chimzen stated, using a more appropriate word for the letter “M” tattooed on Mathias’s cheek.

Mathias the monkey’s eyes were a furnace of hatred, and he still possessed his cursed snake tongue ability of speech, just like Frank and Philip had had.

‘Kee bra keesh junt hint...,’ he began with another spell.

‘Now, we can’t have him hurting himself any more than he has already, now can we?’ Chimzen spoke sternly.

‘There’s no monkey chirp with the man that talks,’ he began chanting.

‘So let it be with this hairy one, only animal sounds and noise.’

The good wizard hastily completed the spell, aiming his staff towards Mathias with a blasting hit of life changing power, to block him from ever using his cursed

tongue again. So the only sound that came forth that day was a monkey's harmless frustrated chatter.

Mathias jumped up and down, screaming a final blood-curdling monkey cry of bitter resentment, and bounded off into the woods on all fours with his tail coiled between his legs like a whimpering dog.

The boys were absolutely stunned and stared after him with their mouths gaping.

'Don't look so surprised,' Chimzen said, handing them his little black book of magic open somewhere near the back. 'It's a mirror spell. It backfires on any evil spell aimed at us.'

'But what is it supposed to say?' Philip asked, pondering over the strange Gothic text.

'Sorry, of course, they don't teach you this sort of thing at school,' he chuckled. 'Let me translate.'

*'The wicked incantation of darkness, truth to the night,
If ever that should haunt us, let the rebellion turn and fight,
Evil turned on evil, the mirror knows no right,
Reflect all that's destructive, protect truth and purest light.'*

'That's amazing,' Philip gasped.

'Oh, I get it!' Frank exclaimed, 'So you never had to break any wizard laws by changing Mathias into a monkey yourself; instead you just let him do it all by himself.'

'You are catching on quickly, lad,' Chimzen squeezed his shoulder gently and smiled. 'I did have to stop him from talking though, which wasn't altogether the right thing to do.'

'I think he is an exception to the rule, Chimzen,' Philip said, in awe of his amazing powers, 'and you had every right to do what you did, considering all the terrible things he's done.'

'I guess so,' the good wizard answered softly, leaning over on his staff and staring blankly into the distance. 'Anyway, I think it's time you boys went home already. It's getting terribly late.'

Frank and Philip's hearts pounded in relief. Mathias had eventually received a suitable punishment fit for his crimes, and the boys would finally be leaving for home!

Chapter 26

The trio were chatting anxiously amongst themselves, deciding on which one of the boys they would teleport home first.

‘Don’t be silly Zip,’ Zen snapped, spinning around his sister ball in frustration, ‘it really makes absolutely not one bit of difference whichever way we do it.’

‘Let’s take them both to Frank’s house first, seeing as he stays furthest away,’ Zet suggested, ‘then we can take Philip home on the way back.’

‘How will the trio know where we are staying?’ Philip asked.

‘Don’t you worry about that my boy,’ Chimzen chuckled, ‘the trio know Senton Village like the back of their balls. Many a night do they take to your neighbourhood for a pleasant little joy spin.’

‘They have your addresses already so there’s no need to worry yourselves. In a few minutes you will both be as safe as a monkey in a cage.’

‘Let’s just forget the talk of monkeys, why don’t we?’ Frank suggested, sad to be leaving his kind wizard friend behind. Chimzen apologized for the comment, clearing his throat with a big grin on his face.

‘Will we ever be seeing you again, Chimzen?’ Philip asked, looking very sad.

‘W-well,’ Chimzen stammered at a loss for words. ‘I don’t think that will really be possible, if you know what I mean?’ There was a long silence, the boys stood with their heads hung down looking very mournful.

‘We’ll make a plan, okay?’ the kind wizard encouraged, arranging the boys back to back in teleport position. ‘Don’t worry, I’ll make a plan to see you soon.’

‘But how, Chimzen?’ Philip asked with a note of urgency in his voice, ‘there’s going to be a big wall surrounding the woods very soon.’

‘Never mind, never mind, my friend. You will see me when you see me; don’t you worry about a thing.’ Chimzen had grown fond of his two new friends and it saddened his heart all the same to have to see them go, although he did try his best not to show it.

The boys waved a reluctant goodbye while the trio took the coordinates of their exact positions. Then they spun off towards Senton Village to deliver their precious cargo.

* * * * *

Frank walked down the narrow little pathway to his house. His knees trembled and his heart thumped in his chest. He was expecting the worst when the front door was finally opened. This was even more frightening for him than his confrontation with the Indian plants. In fact, the poor boy was scared clear out of his wits. He raised a trembling fist to knock on the door. As his hand came down for a feeble knock the solid oak door swung open, and Frank's father stepped out.

His father was a well-built man with olive skin and his hair was cut in a short brush cut the same as Frank's was. His facial features were hardened with well defined facial lines, and his chest was a solid board as a result of hard physical daily training, blood, sweat, and tears. He was dressed in full military uniform with a full spread of colourful rank displayed across his left pocket.

Much to Frank's absolute surprise, his father leaned forward and embraced him like never before with tears of relief streaming down his cheeks.

'I love you son, I love you,' he cried, tightening his grip all the more.

'I love you too, dad, but ...' Frank started.

'I don't want to hear it son!' the soldier commanded, grabbing him firmly by the arm and dragging him inside. 'It doesn't matter to me. You are home, safe, alive and well. Losing your mother is more than I can handle; thank God you're okay, son.'

Two years ago Frank had lost his mother to cancer, and ever since then things hadn't been quite the same between him and his father. Things were now strangely different though; this was the first time he had seen his father cry since she was gone. There was just no way Mr Featherstone could handle the loss of his son as well. Ever since the death of Mrs Featherstone Frank's father had grown strangely distant, pushing his son to one side, and placing his militant position of authority first over his relationship with him.

This had been a wake-up call, and from now on he would spend all his spare time with his precious boy, a special young life taken for granted in the past. Funny how we only really miss someone when they're gone, isn't it?

So that night Frank and his father caught up with old times and not once was the journey to the woods ever even given a mention. His father had made a meal fit

for a king: roast lamb and potatoes. Boy, it was good to have a decent piece of meat for a change after eating nothing but fruit for so long.

Frank soaked in a long hot bath, while his father discarded his sweaty old school clothes. A nice change of clothing was like having a body with a brand new layer of velvet skin. As soon as his head hit the pillow, the boy was out for the count just like the competitor he had knocked out in the Senton boxing championships the month before.

* * * * *

Philip waved the Malco trio goodbye, his heart grieved by having to suddenly bid them a farewell. His mother was a very different kind of person compared with Frank's father. She gave him far too much attention. In fact she could be quite a nag bag at the best of times. Being that way inclined, she insisted on having all the dirty details. Philip tried his best to avoid all the far-fetched meaty events of his and Frank's adventure together, but without them the story would have been completely impossible to tell.

'What on earth happened to your school uniform, Philip? How did you manage to destroy your shirt like that?'

Within a very short space of time she had managed to drag the entire story out of him from monkey boys to fairies' petals.

Mrs Birch was a plump lady with short dark brown hair, and she wore a pair of bottle-bottom looking, thick lensed glasses. She looked nothing like her son at all, but Philip's father was the spitting image of his son, with the same lanky structure and untidy ginger hair.

He was an archaeologist, away in Africa at the time, somewhere near an historical burial site. He had been informed of the mysterious disappearance of his son a few days back, and was unable to fly home straight away due to the poor transport facilities available in that remote part of the country. The poor man would only be able to return the following day.

Mrs Birch was classified as the town gossip, and she drooled over Philip's daily events as if they were a "Sunday Times" newspaper. The two of them were constantly fighting as there was no real father figure in the house to maintain any kind of order. Mr Birch was always gallivanting from one continent to the next in search of buried artefacts that would somehow change the history of the world as we know it today forever. I guess Mrs Birch never showed her son very much respect, and never really cared for his opinion on things either, so how could she

expect the same in return?

‘Philip, you had us worried sick,’ she moaned, shoving a plate of meatballs and potatoes in front of him. ‘Your father has been phoning me on the hour to see whether we’ve found you or not.’

‘Wow, that’s really big of him,’ he muttered.

‘What was that, Philip?’

‘Never mind.’

‘Either you are running a temperature boy, and you are a bit delirious, or you are telling me a serious nonsense story.’ She placed her hand on his forehead to check the warmth of his skin.

‘It’s the truth for goodness sake, mother!’

‘Phew, you stink,’ she answered, taking no notice of his adamant statement. ‘Go and bathe when you’re finished eating, and give me what’s left of your school uniform so I can throw it in the wash.’

Philip had decided that arguing with his mother was a complete waste of time, and wolfed down his meatballs as if it were his last supper. They really tasted good.

* * * * *

‘Why did you bring me here, mother? You’re the one that’s crazy,’ Philip moaned. They were waiting at Dr Rubenstein’s consulting room the following morning – an extension to the Senton Village psychiatric institution.

‘I need you to tell the good Dr Rubenstein your little story, then he can decide how mentally stable you are, my child. We can’t have you making a big scene at school about fairies, goblins, and pixies, now can we?’ Philip sat quietly with his arms folded. It almost appeared as though black smoke was rising from his ears.

Dr Rubenstein was a lanky man in his mid-forties with a long pointed nose and a severely receding hairline. It was quite apparent that he was very stressed out, and that he had more than his fair share of chemically imbalanced minds to deal with.

‘What is the problem, young man?’ he asked shortly, fiddling nervously with a fountain pen.

‘Nothing at all, doctor.’

‘Nothing?’

‘Tell the doctor what you told me last night, boy,’ Mrs Birch asked, stroking his hand, and using her sweetest possible tone of voice.

‘I told you nothing last night mother.’

‘Don’t lie to me Philip!’ she snapped, gripping his hand firmly with her semi

chewed fingers. 'What is it that you told me last night?'

Dr Rubenstein's eyes stared at Philip's mother like gaping tunnels. She shook Philip's hand like an FBI agent trying to shake a confession out of someone. With Philip choosing wisely to follow a vow of silence, Mrs Birch proceeded to tell Mr Rubenstein his fairy story.

'Really?' he nodded. 'I've heard some interesting stories before but this one really takes the cake, my boy. 'I must say, you do have a wonderful imagination.'

'My mother has a wonderful imagination doctor, not me,' Philip insisted, without so much as a blink.

'How dare you say that that was my story?' Mrs Birch exclaimed in horror.

'Because it is your story mother; that's why you came to see the doctor in the first place. You need help, mother.'

Dr Rubenstein clicked frantically at his pen while Mrs Birch took her nappy rash out on poor Philip.

'That's enough, Mrs Birch!' the doctor rapped. 'Please take a seat!'

Mrs Birch looked at Dr Rubenstein, a bit shocked, and sat down quietly blushing with embarrassment.

'I have decided to give you and your son both something to calm yourselves a bit.' He reached across the table and handed Mrs Birch a small white Senton psychiatric issue packet filled with little orange tablets. 'Take one in the morning and one at night. I think that both of you just need a bit of calming down, that's all. And it's nothing to get embarrassed about; we all have our issues, Mrs Birch.'

'Yes doctor,' Mrs Birch answered, sounding rather feeble.

Without any further ado, she grabbed Philip by the shoulder and snuck out of Dr Rubenstein's consulting room. Philip's poor mother could have died with embarrassment. She would be the laughing stock of Senton Village when word got out about her little trip to the hospital. She was very mistaken about that though, because Dr Rubenstein had better things to do with his time than spread cheap gossip around.

Chapter 27

Philip woke up with a startled jump as Mr Whittle slammed his cane on the board.

‘When will you ever get it into your thick head, Mr Cresnut?’ he ranted, waving his stick about like an orchestra conductor. ‘All-the-angles-on-a-straight-line-sum-up-to-180-degrees!’

Ralph Cresnut had been placed in the front row of the classroom due to his severe lack of understanding of the basic principles of geometry. Mr Whittle could have placed him on the moon for all it mattered though. Ralph was a long way off understanding mathematics or anything to do with school for that matter.

It was a blistering hot summer’s day. Mr Whittle’s face glowed bright red from the intense heat combined with his soaring blood pressure, caused from the stressful position of trying to educate lethargic and disinterested 8th Grade pupils.

Beads of perspiration poured down Philip’s freckled cheeks like dewdrops from a leaf.

‘It can’t be!’ he moaned, gazing about the classroom half dazed and confused. Sharon Warne and Emmaline Sawyer were seated at the corner classroom window, watching him awake from his afternoon nap.

Philip’s hair was a soaked ginger mangled mess, and his left cheek was stamped with the fine measurement imprints of a Senton High issue ruler. The girls chuckled amongst themselves, and it strangely reminded him of something he had heard before.

‘Hey, classroom dreamer,’ Sharon whispered, chuckling at the poor boy in mockery. ‘What planet have you been on for the past half an hour, dozy-boy?’

Mr Whittle, even with the aid of his thick lensed spectacles, couldn’t extend his vision much further than the first two rows, and was completely unaware of Philip taking a little afternoon snooze.

‘It can’t be a dream, that’s impossible!’ He mopped his sopping head with his freshly pressed school shirt sleeve, then shook it wildly with the feeble expectation

of suddenly shaking himself back to his dream world experience.

Sharon and Emmaline burst into a hysterical fit of laughter, pointing at him as if he were a circus trick or something. He spared them a glance in his bout of confusion, and immediately started to blush red with embarrassment. The two girls were the classroom sweethearts, and he had previously made it his life's endeavour to gain their favour, to impress them somehow, and this most certainly was not the way to be going about it. A beautiful blonde and an equally stunning brunette – both with stunning bodies and gorgeous bright blue eyes that any schoolboy would quite willingly die for. It had turned out an absolute nightmare. He leapt up from his desk in eagerness to prove his unbelievable dream a reality.

'Frank, Frank!' he yelled, tripping over a brown suitcase in desperation to get to his beloved friend.

'Have you gone completely insane, young man?' Mr Whittle barked, slamming his stick on Ralph's desk in anger. Ralph was at the point of drifting off into a peaceful place of slumber. After having spent until the early hours of the morning furiously pushing the buttons to the controls of his new computer game console, a good snooze was exactly what the doctor ordered. He bounced up from his chair like a jack-in-the-box yelling, 'I-am-a-champion!' at the top of his voice. The entire class burst into a fit of hysterics with fat Robert nearly falling out of his chair in a fit of deep bellied giggles. Mr Whittle decided to ignore Ralph's disjointed scream, because if he had to take all of his crazy reactions into account, Ralph would be doing detention every Friday for the rest of his life.

Philip ignored his teacher's question and proceeded to grab Frank by the shoulder.

'Was it all a dream, Frank?' he demanded frantically.

'Was what all a dream?' Frank replied, backing off in surprise.

'Right, Birch!' Mr Whittle bellowed. 'Now you can join Featherstone in detention tomorrow! I have had enough of all this horsing about. I think that the two of you need to be taught a bit of respect. Get back to your desk at once, Birch!'

'I was just kidding,' Frank laughed, winking slyly. 'Of course it all happened. Silver balls, wizards, flowers. Now at least I'll have some company in detention tomorrow.'

'You two stop this talking at once!' Mr Whittle persisted. 'And Mr Birch, get back to your desk this instant!'

Robert noticed Philip chatting with Frank and nearly fell out of his chair all over again, this time in complete and utter disbelief. They were enemies the other day, now they looked like old buddies. How very bizarre!

Philip returned to his desk with a big smile plastered on his face, and he breathed a sigh of relief. He noticed the two class beauties watch in surprise.

‘Since when did Philip become such good friends with the classroom stud?’ Sharon asked her friend, gaping in astonishment.

‘I-I dunno,’ Emmaline replied, looking equally puzzled.

‘How dare the two of you talk to each other when I am speaking?’ the teacher snapped, homing in on the two ladies with his pointing stick like a fencing champion dashing forward to claim the winning strike.

‘Sharon! Emmaline! Detention on Friday!’

‘But, Mr Whittle!’ Sharon complained.

‘No more buts, Sharon! You lot need to show me a little bit more respect from now on. And there will be no more acting the goat, is that clear?’

Everyone was surprised, and a bit shaken by their teacher’s unusual display of assertion.

* * * * *

Suddenly the classroom door swung open with a loud creak, and in stepped the school principal, Mr Edgar Hurly. The classroom fell into a sudden awkward silence, and each pupil gazed ahead with dumbstruck stares. He acknowledged Mr Whittle with a stiff nod, and reached forward in a gesture to take his pointer stick. Mr Hurly was a thin, aged man with dark hair brylcreemed to the sides like someone from the forties. He turned to face the class, scanning the room with cold beady eyes. The terrified children shrank back in their chairs, wishing they could evaporate into the dazzling sunlight.

‘Good afternoon Senton Pupils.’ The entire class sprang to attention, trembling at the knees.

‘Good afternoon, Mister Hurly!’ they sang in chorus.

‘You boys think that you are clever,’ he began to lecture, directing the stick at Frank and Philip as if they were a geographic wall chart. Then he proceeded to take slow strides up and down the front of the classroom like a staff sergeant at dormitory inspection.

‘I know your game, disappearing into the woods like you’ve gone AWOL or something. Having time out like a pair of regular boy scouts living off the fat of the land.

‘Your claim for being enemies is all a lot of codswallop, a cover-up attempt for mischievous behaviour on the outside. Boys like yourselves need to be made

an example of. You need a lesson that will change the pair of you for the better, to teach you the responsibilities attached to becoming mature adults. I see through this notably well thought out scheme like a sheet of fine glass, boys. I am nobody's fool, and this schoolboy nonsense will be dealt with in the most severe manner.' The principal turned to face the class, scanning Frank and Philip with his cold beady eyes.

'I will be on detention duty tomorrow,' he said, staring out of the window for a long while as if lost in deep thought. 'You will both be issued with suitable punishment for your behaviour, and if I am not entirely satisfied with your performance, I will see to it that the pair of you are immediately expelled.'

'What!' they both gasped.

'Yes, Philip, your mother has informed me of the nonsense story that you conjured up,' he said sharply, directing the pointer stick towards him. 'You have not only told her a fictional story, but you have made her sick with worry over the last few days as well.'

'As for you, Frank, your father hasn't spoken to me yet. I have no doubt a man of such honour would be far too ashamed to do so. An athletic achiever like yourself stooping so low; what on earth is becoming of this world, young man?'

Frank and Philip sat braced upright with faces as white as a ghost. Beads of perspiration formed on their foreheads like someone developing a ghastly temperature and breaking into a cold sweat. Philip felt cold shivers surge up and down his spine as if he had just experienced a terrifying close encounter of the third kind.

'Good day Senton scholars,' Mr Hurly said shortly, and returned the pointer stick to Mr Whittle. He closed his speech without allowing the class a moment to stand and greet him in response. 'See you boys tomorrow afternoon in detention, and either be prompt or don't bother to return to Senton High ever again.'

'Not returning here again wouldn't be such a bad thing after all, now would it? Think of it, you could romp about the woods for the rest of your lives like a pair of hobos. Not such a bad idea after all, is it boys?'

With those final cold words of cutthroat sarcasm, he opened the door and marched out of the classroom, slamming it with such incredible force that it almost formed a permanent part of the frame.

Mr Whittle stood frozen in his shoes with beads of frosty perspiration dripping off the end of his enormous snout. One would almost think that he himself had just received a harsh reprimanding, the way he stood trembling like a scolded puppy.

Sharon and Emmaline were nearly dancing, they were so angry with Philip for

lining them up for Friday afternoon punishment.

‘We’ll get you for this, Birch,’ Sharon muttered to herself in childish rage.

Robert was terribly confused. For one, he knew how much Philip hated Frank, and now they were best mates. Even worse, they had conspired against him for a cheap holiday in the woods; now what would he have to say when placed in the line of questioning?

The more the podgy boy pondered the issue, the more he strained his lethargic mind. So without wasting too much precious mental energy he decided to lean back in his chair and take a session of forty winks.

Frank and Philip sat as stiff as boards, with a million and one thoughts rushing through their heads.

Mathias, the flower fairies, and Mr Hurly all reminded Philip of one particular type of cutthroat character. They had both overcome the impossible on planet Floran, not to mention the most treacherous of them all, Mathias. Now they had to overcome a plain old school principal. How difficult could that possibly be compared with what they had already defeated? The only difference was, of course: in this particular situation they didn’t have Chimzen or the trio to back them up.

Chapter 28

The prefabricated classroom was blistering hot, and one would almost believe that the tin roof hot box was used for the purpose of punishing a scholar psychologically as well as physically. Frank and Philip were seated in the front row watching the perspiration ooze out of the sides of Mr Hurly's well brylcreemed head. Surprisingly so, the only other scholars in detention that Friday afternoon were Sharon Warne and Emmaline Sawyer, the two gorgeous young ladies that attended their maths class. It seemed as though Whittle's maths class pupils were the only pickings for detention that week. Emmaline and Sharon scowled at Philip and Frank; their eyes burnt into their backs like a flaring blow torch of bitter resentment.

'You can thank your lucky stars boys,' Mr Hurly announced, gazing at the tiny second hand on his expensive watch. 'Looks like you've made it here right on time.'

'Yes sir!' they replied loudly.

'Just as well, otherwise you wouldn't have to worry about being punctual ever in your lives again.'

'Ladies,' Mr Hurly addressed Sharon and Emmaline, squinting to the back of the prefab with his frog eyes.

'Yes sir!' they snapped, clearly not very impressed. Friday afternoons were usually spent at Senton Dago's, an under eighteens' pool club and diner, where they would shoot pool and flirt with the seventeen year old boys. Now they were confined to the hot box; what a drag.

'Your punishment today will be to encompass the entire school property, and collect all the papers and rubbish that your fellow school pupils have kindly tossed aside. They treat the playground as though it were some kind of gigantic dustbin desperately seeking to be filled.'

Mr Hurly handed each girl a large black plastic bag as they exited the classroom. 'And if those bags aren't full by half past four, you ladies will be working the night shift. Is that quite clear?'

‘Yes, Mr Hurly,’ they replied, scowling at Frank and Philip in disgust. They marched out of the classroom in a huff, leaving the boys all alone in the delightful company of Mr Hurly.

The boys were both a ball of nervous energy, jittering about at their desks like hardened criminals threatened in the line of questioning. Philip wondered what his mother would have said if he had been expelled, or at least, what she would tell the residents of Senton Village; certainly nothing to gossip about in this instance. Frank wondered how his relationship with his father would be affected once he had heard the destructive news, after only having made things right just the other night.

‘Boys, this is how it’s going to work; the moment you have both been waiting for,’ Mr Hurly announced, handing them each a booklet of blank exercise paper and a pen. ‘You both are required to write me an essay. But not your conventional type essay like on mathematics, science or geography. Instead you are required to give me a full account of your journey together in the woods over the last couple of days. Let’s just call it a little exercise in creative writing for argument’s sake.’

The boys gasped, gazing at each other in horror, and shrugging their shoulders.

‘Ah, not all that easy now, is it?’ he smirked, believing that Frank and Philip were up to no good. ‘And if your stories compare, then you are here to stay for the remainder of your high school years. But if they don’t, well then I guess it’s bye-bye to the pair of you.’ Mr Hurly was quite enjoying his clever little moment, and looked at them, feeling certain that he was going to catch them out smartly.

‘You have two hours. Your papers will be compared at precisely four ‘o clock. You may begin.’

The boys were thinking on the same lines: He wants the truth, and that’s exactly what he will get. The papers would most certainly tie up now, wouldn’t they?

The boys put pen to paper, and started scribbling away at a rate of knots. Two hours wasn’t very much time to tell such an incredible story. Mr Hurly looked a bit puzzled as he paced up and down the front of the classroom. They really seemed to have a lot to write about for a nonsense story.

Frank mentioned his encounter with Mathias when they were monkeys and was so lost in thought that he didn’t seem to notice the perspiration splash onto his desk like a running tap. Philip explained the Indian plants on Planet Floran, and almost bit his tongue while remembering the raging fire below the tree from which he had hung.

Four ‘o clock arrived in a flash, with both Frank and Philip still scribbling away frantically at their exercise pads.

‘Pens down!’ Mr Hurly demanded, still looking very puzzled. Philip’s handwriting was barely legible, but his spelling wasn’t all that bad. Mr Hurly was

quite accustomed to deciphering untidy script with all his years of experience as a teacher. Frank's handwriting on the other hand was neat and precise, but his spelling was appalling.

Mr Hurly glanced at Philip, then at Frank, looking suspicious over their frantic scribbling behaviour. Frank stared nervously at his scribbled sheet, and then handed it to the school principal rather reluctantly.

'Please remain seated while I compare notes,' he demanded, shuffling the documents together while he eyed the boys with a condescending stare. 'The next fifteen minutes will be the deciding factor that will seal your fate.'

He placed Frank's essay to one side while he deciphered Philip's untidy hieroglyphic text.

'Interesting,' he muttered, his beady frog eyes opening to twice their usual size. The boys sat upright as stiff as a board. Deep down inside they wished that they could liquidize and pour quietly out of the classroom door. Mr Hurly tried to maintain his composure, and continued to read the far-fetched tale while large droplets of steaming facial sweat dripped off his long pointed nose and poured down his clenched neck muscles, soaking his neatly pressed white collar and shirt.

After struggling to swallow half of Philip's weird and wonderful story, and choking on its far-fetched fantasy, Mr Hurly shoved it onto the desk, gritting his teeth in rage.

The disgruntled principal snatched up Frank's essay, knowing very well that the stories would never compare, and proceeded to read.

The two boys nearly fell over backwards when his hand came slamming down on the front desk in disgust. Then he looked up, focusing on them almost calmly while he shuffled his collar and took a deep breath. His frog eyes scanned the room, bouncing from Frank to Philip like an entranced spectator at a Wimbledon final. He grated his teeth as volumes of sweat combined with sleek Brylcreem flowed down his face like toxic slime.

'This was very well-planned, my boys, and for that I must give you credit,' he hissed softly, trying his utmost to maintain composure. 'Both stories are a perfect match.' The boys breathed a sigh, not exactly with relief, but that they had at least managed to match up to the requirement that had been demanded of them.

'This-is-an-insult!' he barked, slapping the essay papers on Frank's desk, scattering them wildly in all directions. 'What sort of a fool do you boys take me for?'

* * * * *

Sharon burst into the classroom, her face as white as a ghost.

‘Mr Hurly!’ she cried, interrupting him in mid sentence, grabbing him frantically by the arm. ‘Come and look sir! Please come and look!’

‘How dare you interrupt me, child! Can’t you see that I’m busy?’ he barked, nearly losing his foothold with all the overwhelming excitement taking place all at the same time.

‘You must come and have a look sir!’ she insisted.

Mr Hurly’s stress level had risen to dangerous proportions, and he had to grab the corner of Frank’s desk to overcome a sudden spell of dizziness. He paused for a moment, then inhaled deeply.

‘Please come, Mr Hurly!’

‘Oh all right, Sharon!’ he snapped. ‘You had better not be wasting my time, young lady, or you will be in big trouble.’

‘No, Mr Hurly, I wouldn’t dare, sir!’

Frank and Philip were ordered to remain in the classroom while he went to investigate the scene.

‘Let’s go, Frank!’

‘Have you completely lost your mind?’

‘We’re going to get expelled anyway; let’s at least go and see what all the fuss is about.’

‘Good point you have there.’

The boys bolted out of the classroom, following closely behind an excited Sharon, and a flustered Mr Hurly.

‘Look Mr Hurly!’ she exclaimed, pointing towards the open sports field. ‘Over there!’

The complaining school principal reached the open field and suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. His mouth hung wide open in disbelief. What he saw in front of him could not have possibly been real; it was like something out of a science fiction movie. An alien invasion.

‘Malco trio!’ the boys yelled, sprinting up from behind. Emmaline and Sharon gazed at Frank and Philip in disbelief.

‘Do you guys know what this thing is?’

Suspended in midair was a gigantic shimmering yellow pyramid structure, rotating slowly in an uneven motion.

‘Of course we know them!’ Philip exclaimed, hardly believing it himself. ‘They are silver magical balls that radiate magnificent powers, and they are our very good friends.’

‘Nonsense!’ Emmaline snapped. ‘You’re just making it all up.’

Mr Hurly continued to stare in disbelief with drool dripping off his lips. His face was a vision of death and he appeared like a mutant monster snared in a witch’s trance.

Philip ignored Emmaline’s comments and continued staring at the trio pyramid with his heart welling over with joy. Sharon glanced at him, and for the first time she saw the scruffy redhead in a totally different light. She couldn’t understand exactly why it was so, but he seemed so awfully cute.

The trio dispersed, turned to face the little group of bystanders, and rocketed towards them reflecting the late afternoon sun like mercury transformed to golden light. The silver trio chattered and chuckled amongst themselves as they approached the boys and girls, spinning in streaks of wavy shimmering light.

They launched over Frank and Philip’s heads squeaking in delight, then did a U-turn and spun off back across the field. Emmaline dropped her almost full to the brim bag of garbage onto the ground, allowing dozens of crisp packets and toffee wrappers to fly around in all directions, while she gazed at the trio in absolute astonishment.

Suddenly they transformed into what seemed like three tiny show aeroplanes, emitting belching white smoke from their silvery behinds. Zen went first, criss-crossing in an incredible display of large cursive text motions across the sky in front of the gasping schoolchildren. The letters formed slowly in swift strokes of smoky text:

‘Frank and Philip have saved the day’

Then Zet continued below Zen with his zippy part of the rhyme:

‘Malco trio thanks you for being so very brave.’

Zip spun into action completing her piece of the smoke stream magic message.

‘What’s that?’ Emmaline gasped.

‘I think it looks like a monkey,’ Sharon answered, jumping up and down with joy. Zip had very accurately sprayed a fine stream of white smoke to form the features of a monkey holding up a banana. To follow that she sprayed an outline of a large tree. To end off her enormous picture message she outlined a human figure dressed with a schoolboy’s cap and a tie.

‘Monkey, Tree, Schoolboy,’ the girls recited together after completing the Malco picture rhyme, and looked just as confused as they had in the first place.

Frank and Philip laughed at the two puzzled girls, knowing exactly what all the symbols meant.

‘It can’t be,’ Mr Hurly mumbled, still gaping after the trio like a goldfish.

Sharon was so beside herself with all the excitement that she sprinted towards Philip, leapt into his arms and gave him a fat kiss on the cheek. 'You're my hero, Philip, you are my amazingly gorgeous and truly wonderful red headed hero.'

Philip nearly fell over backwards in fright. His face was as red as a beetroot, and he was stuttering like an old English typewriter. 'I-I a-am?'

'Yes, you are, my gorgeous,' she swooned, 'and now I want to hear every last juicy detail.'

'O-of c-course,' he replied, not exactly sure what to do next.

Frank on the other hand never received any female attention that day, but was only too happy to oblige his friend though. His boxing had attracted so much attention to him that he would have been quite happy if he didn't have to see another drooling chick for the rest of the year.

The Malco trio blasted a final circle of smoke around the perimeter of their gigantic message and spun off towards the woods, leaving behind three twisty trails of wispy white smoke.

'Impossible!' Mr Hurly ranted, turning to face the small group. 'There must be an explanation for all this hocus-pocus pie in the sky nonsense. I don't buy any of it.'

Mr Hurly never called Frank or Philip back to the classroom, he never complained when he saw Sharon holding onto Philip, and he never moaned about the upturned bags spewing rubbish all over the place. He just marched towards the school as if he were late for an appointment.

* * * * *

'I can't sleep Doctor,' Mr Hurly complained, with his head slumped over into his hands on the desk of Dr Rubenstein. 'I just toss and turn all night. All I see is this gigantic pyramid rotating around in the sky. My wife is sick with worry; she can't bear it any longer to stay up nights watching me stare at the ceiling.'

'Philip Birch was here with his mother on Thursday morning,' Dr Rubenstein said, leaning back in his chair looking very puzzled. 'She happened to mention this teleport pyramid thing to me, and it sounded very much like the same object that you say you apparently saw, Mr Hurly.'

'Yes but it can't be real, doctor,' he replied, 'the thing I saw was like something out of a science fiction movie. The next thing I know, you will have to admit me. Can you imagine what something like that could do to my reputation? Imagine the news headlines, "SCHOOL PRINCIPAL FOR PSYCHIATRIC EVALUATION". That would be the death of me doctor.'

‘Have you considered the possibility that they may have hypnotised you somehow, Mr Hurly?’

‘Frank and Philip hypnotising me?’ Mr Hurly sniggered. ‘Not very likely, sir. Maybe someone with half a brain, but not those two palookas.’

‘Those boys also saw it though, didn’t they, Mr Hurly? In fact, they have apparently had close encounters with those alien creatures, haven’t they?’

‘So they say, doctor. So they say.’

‘You being here today will be our secret, Mr Hurly.’ Dr Rubenstein stood to his feet and handed him a small packet of orange tablets. ‘All I think is that you are suffering from too much stress over the issue, and I think that you just need to calm yourself a little. Take one in the morning and one at night, and you should be feeling as right as rain within a couple of days.’

Mr Hurly stood up slowly and nodded his head, still looking very puzzled. As he walked out of the door Dr Rubenstein called after him, ‘Do you still intend expelling those boys Mr Hurly?’

The school principal paused momentarily and said, ‘Most certainly not. I think that the best thing to do would be just to forget that any of this had ever happened. Can you imagine if any of this ever got out to the press? I mean, I couldn’t just lie about this, now could I? I saw what I saw doctor.’

Mr Hurly closed the door quietly behind himself, scanning the empty consulting room for any potential blabbermouths. The place was empty.

Dr Rubenstein stood at his desk speculating the possibility of the Malco pyramid and foreign planets being a reality. His mind was just far too practical to indulge himself in any magical wishy-washy though, so he expelled the topic from his mind altogether.

Frank and Philip resumed their lives as ordinary schoolboys once again. Philip had suddenly sprung up from being an inferior nobody to being the number one schoolboy stud. Frank on the other hand learnt to control his temper and got on well with everyone in his form, everyone, including fat Robert, that is.

Mr Hurly was feared by every scholar at Senton High, besides Frank and Philip. He avoided them at any cost. When he came across them on the school playground, he made a point of walking a large banana bend around them as if they were both infected with the black plague or some equally deadly disease. Even if they were sent to him for a caning, he refused the responsibility outright. It would be far better to be safe than sorry, if you know what I mean? After all, what chance would he have up against those interplanetary silver ball friends of theirs?

Chapter 29

‘E-e-e-e-h chir e-e-e-chirip e-e.’ Mathias attempted to conjure up an evil magic spell in monkey code, but it hadn’t worked very well because the dark side couldn’t make head or tail of what exactly he was trying to command them to do.

‘Get working!’ Squidget commanded, bouncing alongside him like a springy jack-in-the-box. ‘There’s a lot of land still to cover before nightfall, monkey wizard.’ Squidget walked alongside Mathias like a prison warden, watching him sow seed of every description into neat little furrows which had been carved into the soil by the little animals inhabiting the woods. He had made countless attempts to try and escape from his tiresome chore, so Chimzen finally decided to shackle him with a ball and chain to make sure that he paid the price for the terrible destruction he had brought upon several plants and trees.

When Mathias attempted to leap onto Squidget in a wild attack, he made a hasty retreat, aided by his magic jumping ointment. The ball and chain held him back while the birds gave him a sharp pecking on his scruffy blue striped monkey head. It was payback time for all the animals inhabiting the woods, to punish him for all the cruel things he had done to them over the years.

Chimzen had magically immobilized all the wiggling piles of ant body part remains, and commanded them into Mathias’s old dwelling shaft, with the aid of his powerful staff.

The wicked monkey gazed in horror while ant abdomens, ant heads and pincers rolled in like bowling balls knocking his home for a strike, then filled to the brim with clumps of fertile soil. His torture camp disappeared in an instant, flattened level by dozens of squirrels, tortoises, and other tiny furry four-legged creatures.

Chimzen looked on while Mathias sowed his final row of seed, spreading it painstakingly over the land much against his wicked judgement. The pecking on the back of his head had stung to the point of being unbearable, and he toiled and sweated in the sun in desperation to complete the chastening task.

‘Enough! I’ve had enough!’ he wailed, tossing the last handful of seed over the enormous opening in misery. ‘Please don’t punish me any longer, cousin, please!’ Without paying him any attention, Chimzen inspected the seed furrows carefully. He then raised his hand, motioning the little animals all to stay clear.

He waved his staff in a slow even motion over the land, ranting under his breath:

*‘Oh barren soil of past, where there once were trees,
Allow thy seed to feel the warmth, and the gentle summer breeze,
With a rumble beneath the ground,
Allow my powers to stir a sound,
The electrifying magical beat,
That makes the seed to sprout in heat,
To populate the barren land right now,
A magnificent rebirth this very hour.’*

With those words the ground began to shake and quiver, with a top soil tremor like the first signs of a tremendous earthquake. Tiny shoots started sprouting from the surface and rapidly germinated into full bloom. Countless sprouts thickened and launched upwards, exploding into enormous trees, while others bloomed into the smaller specimens of plant life that once inhabited the woods. Not intelligent life like on Floran, of course, just your ordinary typical earth bloomers, if you know what I mean?

Mathias struggled to avoid a large pine tree exploding into existence beneath him, and he flew right up after it, until the large steel ball shackled to him finally jerked free and yanked him right back down to earth with a thump.

The once barren land was now densely populated with a splendid array of magnificent trees and plants, spread out across the land, blending perfectly with its surroundings like it always had before.

‘Hooray!’ the animals screamed, overwhelmed that their day of reckoning had finally dawned. Free at last! Free at last! Peace and harmony flooded the woods at last. An abundance of furry creatures appeared from nowhere, chattering amongst themselves in triumph. Finally free to roam their territory like all God’s creatures were intended to do. Thousands of birds of all descriptions and colours flew across the flourishing woods flapping their wings in victory. They had received the message by word of beak that Mathias the treacherous had finally been defeated. The woods were alive with activity. Now that they were protected by a surrounding 8 foot wall, it was a densely populated sanctuary of trees and wild life, a place of peace.

‘Damn you, Chimzen,’ Mathias mouthed hatefully, then checked around to see if anyone had heard him, just in case he should receive another sharp pecking on his head. Chimzen gazed over the flourishing land, looking very pleased with the magnificent restoration that had just taken place. He had hoped for this wonderful day to arrive for a very long time, and now that it finally had, it felt to him like a distant hazy dream.

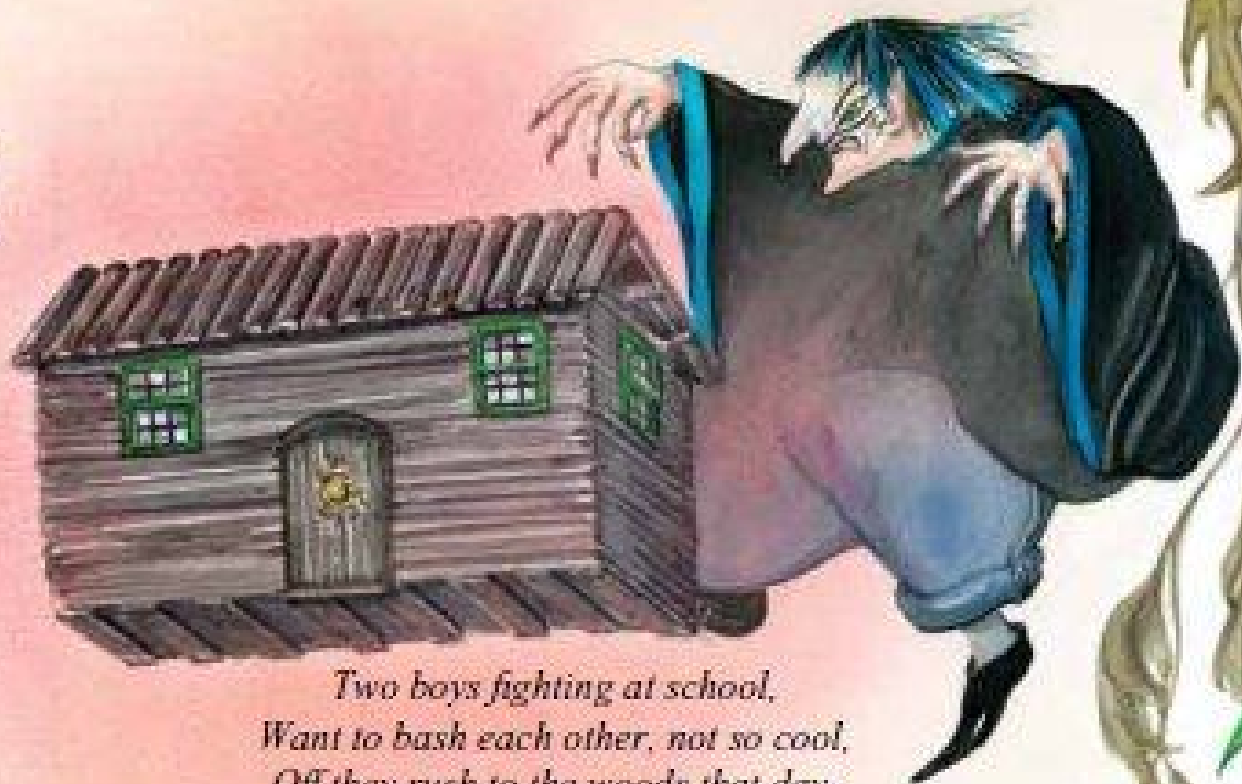
The Malco trio zipped in between a squirrel climbing up a tree at a magnificent speed. What a relief it was for the silver balls not to have to worry about Mathias’s deadly toxic yellow goo any longer, able to spin about the woods as free as a ball should be.

As for Mathias, he remained a monkey, and more than likely is still one today. You see, the funny thing with evil people is, no matter what bad fortune comes across their paths, they never seem to learn from the experience, they only grow more resentful and bitter. Shame, that poor monkey will just have to come to terms with his nasty predicament because he’s on the losing side, outnumbered one to ten thousand furry creatures. Poor, poor Mathias; when will that monkey ever learn?

* * * * *

And as far as the boys are concerned, well they have definitely learnt a few things about life from their little adventure, and they have changed a great deal for the better. And I guess you must be wondering if they will ever go on another adventure with Chimzen?

Well, my friends, that is another story altogether.

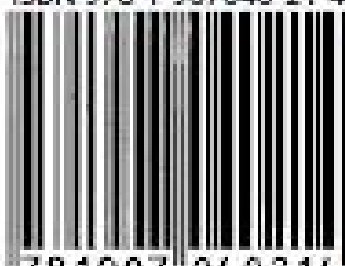


*Two boys fighting at school,
Want to bash each other, not so cool,
Off they rush to the woods that day,
They bump into an evil wizard, oh I do say,
Mathias the treacherous does something awfully funny,
Turns Philip and Frank into a pair of monkeys,
Chimzen the good wizard and his three magical balls,
Rescue the pair by the skin of their paws,
Off to Green Planet they all must go,
To restore their lives to the people they know,
An action adventure with killer plants and foes,
Cunning flower fairies with dainty petal clothes,
It's a journey filled with danger and death on the rise,
Potent fiery sword and tree boy surprise.*

'Green Planet is a real delight. Weird, fast-moving and funny, it grabs the reader at the very beginning, charms and thrills you by turns, and doesn't let go until the end.'

AUSTIN KIRKOR – COMMISSIONING EDITOR – MELROSE BOOKS

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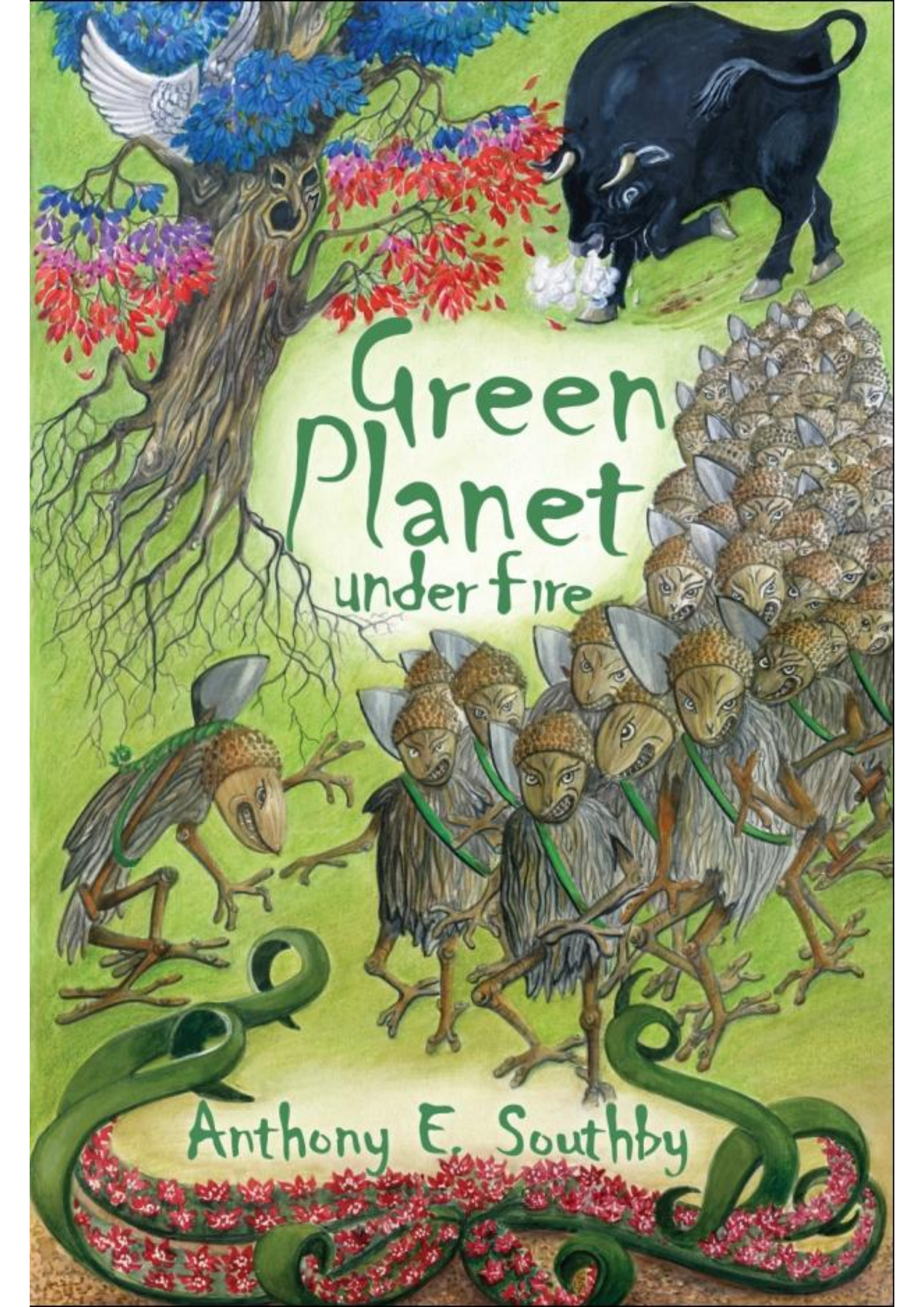
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Green Planet under fire

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